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GREAT WOMEN OF INDIA

THE HOLY MOTHER
BIRTH CENTENARY MEMORIAL

ADVAITA ASHRAMA

"THIS VOLUME, which commemorates the Birth Centenary of a Great Woman of our time, is an attempt, the first of its kind, to survey the position and prospect of women in Indian society during the last five thousand years, and to present a kaleidoscopic picture of their dreams and visions, hopes and aspirations, through an illustrative study of the lives and achievements of the more outstanding among them. The position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level. . . Quite a fascinating picture unfolds itself in the pages of this book. It is a long procession, through the ages, of Indian women who attained greatness in various spheres of life and culture—political and aesthetic, moral and spiritual. And this greatness they attained with the encouragement and good wishes of men in some cases and in spite of their discouragement and prejudices in others. Hence this book is a worthy memorial to Shrī Sāradā Devī, the Holy Mother, in whom Indian womanhood fulfils, nay transcends, its purely Indian character and assumes a world significance."

—*S. Radhakrishnan*

PRICE: Rs. 20/-

3/12/33

GREAT WOMEN OF INDIA

EDITORS
SWAMI MADHAVANANDA
RAMESH CHANDRA MAJUMDAR

THE HOLY MOTHER BIRTH CENTENARY MEMORIAL

ADVAITA ASHRAMA
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS

Published by
Swami Gambhirananda
President, Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas

FIRST EDITION, 1953

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The Holy Mother Birth Centenary Executive Committee
Belur Math, Howrah, West Bengal

Printed in India
By P. C. Ray
Sri Gouranga Press Ltd.
5, Chintamani Das Lane, Calcutta 9

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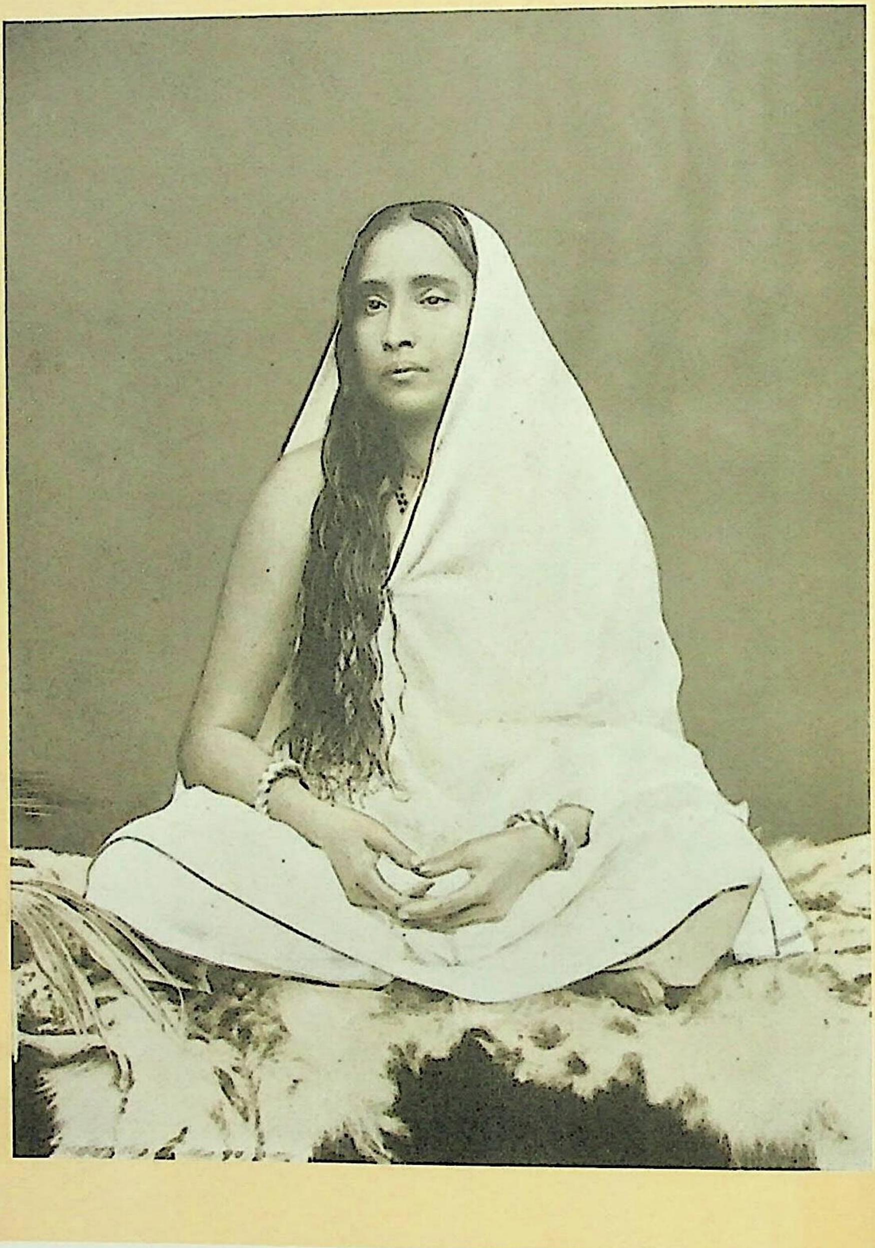

THE HOLY MOTHER

PREFACE

The first Birth Centenary of the Holy Mother, Shrī Sāradā Devī, the spiritual consort of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, falls on December 27, 1953. A short sketch of her life and activities is given in the concluding chapter of this volume. Anybody who reads it will feel convinced that she is revered today by the Order of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, and millions outside it, not because she happened to be the consort of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, but because she became a true disciple of her husband and, during the thirteen years of *sādhanā* under the Master, attained to the highest degree of spiritual realization. So much so that after the passing away of the Master she became the unseen guiding force behind the Rāmakṛishṇa movement and for nearly thirty-four years ministered to the spiritual needs of thousands of sincere seekers after God.

The different stages in the life of the Holy Mother, from a simple village girl to the spiritual head of a great monastic establishment, present many unique features. In some respects she may justly be regarded as the culmination of those qualities which have distinguished the culture, and especially the women, of India. It was therefore in the fitness of things that her first Birth Centenary should be marked, among other things, by the presentation of a systematic, connected and continuous account of the achievements of Indian womanhood.

The committee which was formed to celebrate the occasion in a suitable manner, very naturally, put in the forefront of its programme the publication of a volume entitled *Great Women of India*. It was intended that this book would 'deal with the ideals of Indian womanhood, its position in Indian life and society through the ages, as well as the biographical sketches and contributions of great Indian women who made their marks in different spheres of activities and different periods of Indian history.'

The present volume is the result of this endeavour. It is divided into two main sections. The first gives a general survey of the ideals and position of Indian womanhood in different spheres of

B

life, both in the past and in the present, together with a chapter on the evolution of Mother worship in India. This is intended to emphasize not only the highest conception of woman as mother, but also her potentialities as an instrument for realizing the Divine—the highest honour and reverence that a community can offer to its womanhood. This section mainly seeks to review in a general way what Indian woman was in the past and what she is at present, pointing to the obvious conclusion—what she may be in the future.

The same object is sought to be achieved in the second section by a study of the lives of great women in India—not only those who actually lived and died, but also many others who are known only from literary sources such as the Epics, Purāṇas, and classical Sanskrit literature.

It is unnecessary to discuss the historical character of the latter. Some of them may be real historical personages, while many are undoubtedly legendary, or mere creations of poetical fancy. But whatever may be their real character, they have been, for more than a thousand years, so much the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood that it is impossible to ignore them as mere fictions. They have inspired the thoughts and ideals of our women and shaped their lives for untold centuries, and may be said to have been more real, more living, and more vital than any actual women could be. What living women have proved to be such formative forces as, for example, Satī, Sītā and Sāvitrī? What could be better illustrative examples of the true dignity of Indian womanhood than Draupadī, Shakuntalā and Gāndhārī?

For hundreds of years, millions of Indian women, including girls in their teens, have heard or recited with rapturous interest the stories of these famous women of the past, and to many of them they have been the sole guide and moral inspiration in their lives. All over India, from the Himālayas to Cape Comorin, they have been more familiar and more real than most of the women who have played even a prominent role in Indian history. The women characters in Indian literature may not be historical in the true sense of the term, but they are undoubtedly the representative types of Indian womanhood, who cannot be ignored in any study of India's history.

The force of these observations is considerably strengthened by the undeniable fact that we know so very little of the actual lives of the many great women who flourished in India. We know their names and the particular lines in which they distinguished themselves, but in most cases, hardly anything more than that. Even the few details that we know in some cases are not such as can serve to explain the motive forces behind their lives, or show the gradual growth of their moral virtues and mental powers which can stimulate or inspire others by their examples.

These deficiencies in the delineation of characters are by no means peculiar to the women of India. They are almost equally applicable to men, though there are more exceptions in the latter than in the former case. The reader of this volume is sure to be painfully reminded of this defect at almost every step as he goes through the lives of the great women who actually flourished in our soil. He would then realize the inestimable good that our literature has accomplished by holding out before us the pictures of great women, in all spheres of life, throbbing with vitality and showing a fullness of life by the interaction of different, sometimes even jarring, motive forces, as was undoubtedly the case with many of the historical figures, which however, we sadly miss in the actual accounts of their lives.

In spite of this great deficiency, the panorama of great women of India represented in this volume cannot but evoke a profound interest. They cover a wide range of time and space, from the dawn of Indian civilization, represented in the *Ṛig-Veda,* to the end of the nineteenth century, and extending over the whole of the sub-continent of undivided India. For the sake of convenience, both of treatment and understanding, some classifications have been adopted in Part II, which are not quite accurate from the point of view of either chronology or subject-matter. The first two divisions, marked A and B, are on a religious basis, dealing with the great women known, respectively, from Brāhmaṇical literature and that of the heterodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism. From the standpoint of chronology, the two divisions cut across each other, and as regards the types of characters portrayed, there are common features in both, particularly in respect of literary and spiritual attainments.

The next three divisions, C, D, and E, are chronological, though the first two of these are further subdivided on a regional basis.

Here, again, chronologically the divisions B and C cut across each other, and the subdivisions under C and D represent more or less the same types, arranged under different regions. It is to be distinctly understood, therefore, that these regional divisions are more due to considerations of practical convenience than to any inherent distinction of types represented in each.

As a matter of fact, the types represented in C, D, and E possess many features in common. There are scholars, poets, administrators and brave fighters, as well as those distinguished by piety, charity, or other moral virtues of a very high order. Only those women who have proved their greatness by these or other qualities of a similar nature have been included in this volume. This has naturally led to the exclusion of some who possess greater fame or celebrity than many of those who have been included. To cite only one example, Mumtāz Begum, immortalized by the Tāj Mahal, finds no place in this volume, since she has no claim to real greatness by her known character and exertions.

As this volume deals with the great women of India, we had to exclude from its purview some notable women of foreign countries who spent their lives in the service of India. The two most famous examples of such exclusion are Sister Niveditā and Mrs. Annie Besant. Sister Niveditā dedicated her life to the welfare of the Indian womanhood, and was closely associated both with the Holy Mother and the Rāmakṛishṇa Mission. But her life is not treated in this volume for, though her greatness and service to India were undoubted, she was not an Indian by birth.

This volume, dealing with the great women of India, will, we hope, remove a long-felt need. The position of woman in a society is usually regarded as a fair index of the excellence of its culture and the character of its civilization. It is, therefore, necessary to make an objective study of the womanhood of India. There have been both undue encomium and much misinformed criticism on this subject. A presentation of the known facts concerning the great women of India, and a discussion of the ideals and position of women in India, in a detached spirit, are likely to lead to a proper understanding of the subject and a correct assessment of Indian culture. This volume presents a brilliant array of great Indian women, many of whom are little known; and this, by itself, is no mean contribution to our proper appreciation of the womanhood of India. Owing to the deplorable lack of materials, most of them are drawn as mere skeletons, but let us hope that, at some future date, our more fortunate successors will be able to put flesh and blood in them, and make them real human beings pulsating with life.

The international system of transliteration is generally followed in this volume with the following departures necessitated by practical considerations: *ṛi, ch, chh, sh, ṣh* and *ḷ* stand respectively for *ṛ, c, ch, ś, ṣ,* and ळ, while *w* is substituted for *v* after consonants.

The object which the Executive Committee had in view in preparing this volume has been stated at the outset. How far this object has been achieved, it is for the readers to judge. But no pains have been spared to make it worthy of the occasion. A band of well-known writers, all over India, have volunteered their services, at considerable sacrifice, to ensure the success of this undertaking. Some have contributed learned articles, others have, in addition, carefully revised them, or have helped in various other ways. To all these we offer our most grateful thanks. It is always a hard and delicate task to pick up individual names, where we have received help and sympathy from so many quarters. But we shall be failing in our duty if we omit to mention Dr. S. K. De, Prof. Haridas Bhattacharya, Dr. A. P. Pusalker, Prof. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, Sri C. Sivaramamurti, Prof. Sukesh Chandra Maulik and Acharya Nandalal Bose, who have helped us in various ways.* To Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, we offer our special thanks for having written the Introduction to this volume. The name of some Swāmīs of the Rāmakṛishṇa Mission are not included in the above list, because the monks are above all praises and thanks.

In conclusion, we gratefully place on record our deep obligations to the Dowager Mahārānī of Mysore and the Government of India, Ministry of Education, for their generous donation towards the cost of the publication of this volume.

R. C. Majumdar

December, 1953

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* To this list we gratefully add the name of Dr. R. C. Majumdar for his valuable article, Preface and editing work.—*Publisher*

INTRODUCTION

I

Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood, as the essays in this book indicate, though occasionally we find derogatory references to women. Even God is regarded as half man, half woman, *ardha-nārīshwara*. Manu declares that where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased ; where they are not honoured, all works become fruitless (3. 56).

Women are human beings and have as much right to full development as men have. In regard to opportunities for intellectual and spiritual development, we should not emphasize the sex of women even as we do not emphasize the sex of men. The fact that we are human beings is infinitely more important than the physiological peculiarities which distinguish us from one another. In all human beings, irrespective of their sex, the same drama of the flesh and the spirit, of finitude and transcendence, takes place.

Women cannot do some things that men can. Their physiology prevents this. That, however, does not prove any inferiority on their part. We must do the things for which we are made and do them well.

In early times education of women was encouraged. The goddess of learning is Saraswatī. The *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* says: "A girl also should be brought up and educated with great effort and care" (8. 47).

The *Devī-māhātmya* declares: "All forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee ; and all women throughout the world are Thy forms" (11. 6). We hear of great women like Maitreyī, Gārgī, Arundhatī, Līlāvatī, etc.

In the Vedic Age women enjoyed equal opportunities for education and work. They were eligible for *upanayana* or initiation and *brahmacharya* or study of Brahma-knowledge.

In certain periods of our history, education of women was sadly neglected, and women lapsed into illiteracy and superstition.

Writing to Margaret Noble (Sister Niveditā) on July 29, 1897, Swāmī Vivekānanda said:

"Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman, a real lioness to work for Indians, women especially.

"India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and, above all, your Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted."

If Swāmī Vivekānanda complained, "India cannot yet produce great women," it is because of the degradation to which they were subjected in recent times. We have wasted, in our recent past, women's gifts by failing to recognize them as human beings, able to act, to achieve, and to engage in projects, given the right condition.

Thanks to the Rāmakṛishṇa movement and Gāndhī's work, women are slowly coming into their own. It is true that Rāmakṛishṇa advised renunciation of women and of wealth for his male devotees; but that was only in view of man's possible weakness with regard to the opposite sex, for he also advised his women devotees to renounce men and wealth. Rāmakṛishṇa's respect for womanhood comes out in his dealings with his wife Shrī Sāradā Devī and other women. He accepted a lady, Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī, for his teacher. Woman is not innately wicked, any more than man is. Gāndhī engaged many women in his struggle for the political liberation of the country. This has helped in the emancipation of Indian women.

II

While spiritual life and social service are open to women, marriage and motherhood are treated as the normal vocation for them. Modern anthropology brings out clearly that marriage and family are found in one form or another as fundamental institutions in every human society, primitive or civilized. It is difficult to imagine a social organization in which these institutions are not found. The relation of man and woman is the expression of an urge for duality.

Each is a self which requires the other as its complement. The division of the sexes is a biological phenomenon, not a historical event like the division of races and classes. Male and female constitute ordinarily a fundamental unity.

The institution of marriage was exalted in the Indian tradition. Women were free to choose their husbands. The freedom of women is evident from the account of the popular festival called *samanas,* where men and women met and mixed freely. There is an interesting passage in the *Saptashatī* where Durgā, who is *kumārī,* virgin, tells the Asuras who aspired to marry her: "He who conquers me in battle, he who humbles my pride, he who is my equal in this world, he shall be my husband." Women were not the bondslaves of pleasure. The end of marriage is spiritual comradeship. The *Mahābhārata* says: "Let this heart of yours be mine, and let this heart of mine be yours" (1. 3. 9). Yet sex life was not despised. Its importance for human development was recognized.

It has been the tendency of man to use woman as an object of amusement and pleasure. Woman is asked to look upon man as the meaning and justification of her existence. This is in line with the well-known saying, "He for God only, she for God in him." It is often said that the Oriental woman is a slave. It only means that self-assertion is not her quality. The Oriental woman is not very different from other women in her innermost nature. She remains essentially feminine on account of her social and religious culture. She gives and not takes. The world over, women are devoted and obedient. They dare to suffer where men would shrink.

In both men and women, especially in women, there is a deep desire to reproduce their kind. This is not a product of social conditioning. The satisfactions and creative opportunities of motherhood are well known. A woman bears the suffering caused by the pains of labour, but she forgets them in the joy of creation. She is essentially not the object of man's lust, but is the mother, the maker, the leader. It is the privilege of a mother to bring up her children, to help them to develop their distinctive gifts, physical and mental, ethical and spiritual. *Mātṛi-devo bhava*—treat your mother as a goddess—is the advice given to the young. Again, Manu says: "One *āchārya* excels ten *upādhyāyas* in glory ; a father excels a hundred *āchāryas* in glory ; but a mother excels even a thousand fathers in glory" (2. 145). Marriage without motherhood is incomplete.

The weakening of the union of marriage and so of the family is causing widespread concern. It is no use congratulating ourselves that things are not so bad here as in some other countries. For the deterioration is increasing gradually in our country. To check it we have to adopt higher standards of education and moral instruction, not merely for women but also for men. A successful marriage requires personal adjustments, which are not easy to make. They are possible only when we accept certain ethical and religious standards.

III

This spirit of Indian culture does not deny to individual women the opportunity for spiritual development or intellectual eminence. Those who are inclined towards saintliness or scholarship become *sannyāsinīs* in spirit, though not always in form. Undivided allegiance to their aims is demanded of them. Shrī Sāradā Devī is a noble example of this type.

She impressed all those who had the privilege of meeting her as an embodiment of grace, purity and simplicity.

Sister Niveditā said of her:

"To me it has always appeared that she (Shrī Sāradā Devī, the Holy Mother) is Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood. But is she the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new? In her, one sees realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain. And yet, to myself the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her hesitate, in giving utterance to large and generous judgement, however new or complex might be the question put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer. Her whole experience is of theocratic civilization. Yet she rises to the height of every situation. Is she tortured by the perversity of any about her? The only sign is a strange quiet and intensity that comes upon her. Does one carry to her some perplexity or mortification born of social developments beyond her ken? With unerring intuition she goes straight to the heart of the matter, and sets the questioner in the true attitude to the difficulty. Or is there need for severity? No foolish sentimentality causes her to waver. The novice whom she may condemn, for so many years to beg his bread, will leave the place within the hour. He who has transgressed her code of delicacy and honour, will never enter her presence again. . . .

"And yet is she, as one of her spiritual children said of her, speaking literally of her gift of song, 'full of music,' all gentleness, all playfulness. And the room wherein she worships, withal, is filled with sweetness."

The large majority of women, as men, however, prefer marriage and motherhood to the life of saintliness, science or scholarship. They are the great conservators of our culture. Even in families where they have received the modern education, they adhere to the household ritual, cradle song and popular poetry. A definite philosophy of life is bound up with these. By the very quality of their being, women are the missionaries of civilization. With their immense capacity for self-sacrifice they are the unquestioned leaders in *ahiṁsā*. They will yet teach the arts of peace to the warring world.

IV

This volume, which commemorates the Birth Centenary of a Great Woman of our time, is an attempt, the first of its kind, to survey the position and prospect of women in Indian society during the last five thousand years, and to present a kaleidoscopic picture of their dreams and visions, hopes and aspirations, through an illustrative study of the lives and achievements of the more outstanding among them. The position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level. Men, who are responsible for many of the views about women, have woven fantastic stories about the latter's glamour and instability, and their inferiority to men as well as their mystery and sanctity. Quite a fascinating picture unfolds itself in the pages of this book. It is a long procession, through the ages, of Indian women who attained greatness in various spheres of life and culture—political and aesthetic, moral and spiritual. And this greatness they attained with the encouragement and good wishes of men in some cases and in spite of their discouragement and prejudices in others. Hence this book is a worthy memorial to Shrī Sāradā Devī, the Holy Mother, in whom Indian womanhood fulfils, nay transcends, its purely Indian character and assumes a world significance. And it is but fitting that this survey of the great women of India should close with a study of her life and work.

CHAPTER I

IDEAL AND POSITION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN DOMESTIC LIFE

1. Early Vedic Period

The recognition of a definite relationship between a man and a woman as husband and wife forms the very basis of domestic life in a civilized society. But it is obvious that a long period—perhaps hundreds and thousands of years—must have intervened between the evolution of *homo sapiens* and the general approval or acceptance of the idea of a woman's fidelity to a single man. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss, as a general question, all the intermediate stages—or even the important ones—between the state of promiscuity in regard to sexual union and the ideal of a chaste wife. But it is necessary to refer briefly to this primitive aspect of life in India in order that we may fully comprehend some of the peculiar features of domestic life in India in subsequent ages.

It is held by many scholars "that the human race must have originally lived in a state of promiscuity, where individual marriage did not exist, where all the men in a horde or tribe had indiscriminate access to all the women, and where the children born of these unions belonged to the community at large." But it is opposed by no less an authority than Westermarck who has discussed the question at great length.[1] Without entering into any controversy on this subject, it may be pointed out that there are clear references in Indian literature to a state of promiscuity in ancient Indian society. A passage in the *Mahābhārata* describes in detail how such a state of things existed in Indian society till it was prohibited by a sage named Shwetaketu, who was shocked beyond measure to find his own mother going out with a stranger in the presence, and with the full approval, of his own father. It is also added that the custom was still in vogue in Uttara-Kuru.[2] Even apart from this general statement there are incidental references to a state of promiscuity existing in certain regions in India during the time of the Pāṇḍavas.[3]

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[1] E. Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, Vol. 1, ch. 3; here the different views are quoted with full reference to authorities.

It is difficult to say definitely whether the great Epic describes an actual state of things existing at some remote period, of which the tradition was preserved in the days of its author, or whether it was a mere possible or probable state of things intellectually conceived by him[4] as a stage in the evolution of human society. But the earliest state of Indian society, of which we get a faithful picture in the Saṁhitā of the *Ṛig-Veda,* seems to indicate that such a state of promiscuity, if it ever existed, was already replaced by the institution of marriage. Although, from the very nature of its composition, we cannot expect to derive full information from this work, we have enough data to reconstruct the general outline of the family life during the early Vedic period.

The Saṁhitā of the *Ṛig-Veda* has fortunately preserved one particular hymn (10. 85) which proves that not only the institution of marriage but also the ideals which characterized it in India in later days were already deeply rooted in the minds of men. Its interest, however, transcends the narrow bounds of India, as it is perhaps the oldest written document in the world which gives an ideal picture of the marriage system with all that it involves in a civilized society.[5]

The subject-matter of this hymn is the marriage of Sūryā, the daughter of the Sun and a form of the Dawn, who is regarded as the typical bride. We learn from it that the friends of the bridegroom came to the bride's father with the proposal of marriage, and evidently it was settled by him. The ceremony took place at the bride's house, and the decorated bride, with her companions, came to the marriage pandal. Then the bridegroom took the hand of the bride in his own hand, probably in front of fire, with the words, "I take thy hand in mine for happy fortune that thou mayst reach old age with me thy husband. Gods . . . have given thee to be my household's mistress." Later he offers another prayer: "O Pūshan, send her on as most auspicious, her who shall be the sharer of my pleasures; her who shall twine her loving arms about me and welcome all my love and mine embraces."

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[2] *Mahābhārata,* Cr. Ed. 1. 113. 7-20. [3] *Ibid.* 2. 28. 23-4.

[4] Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation,* p. 35.

[5] It is necessary to slightly alter the order of the hymns in order to get a comprehensive picture of the ceremony. Cf. Sakuntala Rao, *Women in the Vedic Age,* pp. 14 ff.

After the rituals were over the bride left her father's home for that of her husband. This change is emphasized in the prayers addressed to Vishwāvasu, one of the Gandharvas, and supposed to be the protector of virgins. "Rise up from hence, Vishwāvasu. . . . Seek thou another willing maid in her father's house. This maiden hath a husband; with her husband leave the bride." "I free thee (the bride) from thy father's family but not from thy husband's. I make thee softly fettered there. O Indra, may she live blest in her fortune and her sons." Lastly, she is urged "to go to the husband's house to be the household's mistress," and prayers were offered to the gods for their safe journey. On her arrival at the new home, she was welcomed by the friends and relatives of her husband with the verse, "Happy be thou and prosper with thy children here, be vigilant to rule thy household in this home. Closely unite thy body with this man thy husband. So shall ye, full of years, address your company." To the guests assembled to welcome the newly married pair it is said: "Signs of good fortune mark the bride; come all of you and look at her. Wish her prosperity, and then return unto your homes."

After the guests had departed, the bride was addressed as follows, probably when offering sacrifice: "Be ye not parted, dwell ye here; reach the full time of human life. With sons and grandsons sport and play, rejoicing in your own abode."

Then the husband addresses the wife: "So may Prajāpati bring children forth to us, may Aryaman adorn us till old age come nigh. Not inauspicious enter thou thy husband's house; bring blessings to our bipeds and our quadrupeds. . . . Over thy husband's father and thy husband's mother bear full sway. Over the sister of thy husband, over his brothers rule supreme."

The husband then prays, "O bounteous Indra, make this bride blest in her sons and fortunate. Vouchsafe to her ten sons, and make her husband the eleventh man."

Then there is the concluding prayer offered jointly by the bridegroom and the bride: "So may the Universal gods, so may the Waters join our hearts. May Mātarishwan, Dhātar and Deṣhṭṛi together bind us close."

Thus ends this remarkable hymn which may be regarded as the earliest expression of human thoughts concerning marriage viewed as a sacrament and a willing union of two loving hearts.

It will be quite evident from a perusal of this hymn that the institution of marriage was fully developed long before the end of the age represented by the Saṁhitā of the *Ṛig-Veda*. It also throws interesting sidelight on the position of the woman. She was not only her husband's lifelong companion in weal and woe, but the mistress of his household, and a real partner in all his activities, including religious sacrifices. The union of the wife and husband, both in body and mind, is repeatedly emphasized, and her entry into the husband's home is regarded as an auspicious event bringing blessing to the entire household, including the domestic birds and animals. The hymn holds out before us the pleasant picture of a happy home where husband and wife, faithful to each other, pass their lives in peace and prosperity, and spend the well-earned rest in old age amid sons and grandsons.

This is, of course, an ideal picture, but even as such it has a very great value by way of showing how far the Indian culture had marched forward in its progressive career since the primitive days of sexual promiscuity. Indeed, it may be said without much exaggeration that almost all the essential features of the fully developed married life in ancient India were already developed in the age of the *Ṛik Saṁhitā*. This is further supported by incidental notices scattered in the *Saṁhitā*.

The Vedic word *'dampati,'* used to denote jointly the husband and the wife, etymologically means the joint owners of the house. The same idea is also contained in the *Āvestā*, but whereas the *Āvestā* enjoins upon the wife strict obedience to her husband, the marriage ritual in the *Ṛig-Veda* (and also in its fully developed form in the *Gṛihya-sūtras*) does not enjoin obedience upon the wife. This position of dignity was upheld by her participation in religious practices and sacrifices, which was regarded as the highest right and privilege in the society of those days. The woman was entitled to all the *saṁskāras* or religious sacraments like men, and not only were religious prayers and sacrifices jointly offered by the husband

and the wife, but the wife alone could offer them in the absence of her husband. To crown all, many women were regarded as *ṛishis* or seers, i.e. composers of hymns, and some of the hymns in the *Ṛik Saṁhitā* are actually attributed to women. Twenty such hymn-composing ladies are named in the *Sarvānukramaṇikā*. This is, of course, a later work, and some of the attributions may be wrong. But there is no valid reason to doubt that some of the *Ṛig-Vedic* hymns were actually composed by women. Lopāmudrā, Apālā, Vishwavārā, Sikatā, Nivāvarī and Ghoṣhā are some of the famous women whose names have been preserved in later literature.

The grounds for such high literary attainments were prepared by education in childhood. The girls, like boys, underwent the *upanayana* ceremony (sacred initiation) at an early age, perhaps about the age of eight, and began the Vedic studies. That this was the usual practice, and continued even in later ages, is proved by many interesting evidences. We are told in the *Atharva Saṁhitā* (11. 5. 18) that "by Vedic studentship a girl wins a young husband." This shows that high education was regarded as a necessary accomplishment for being well placed in life. Even in later Vedic Age we hear of two classes of educated women: (1) *sadyodwāhās,* who prosecuted their studies till their marriage and (2) *brahmavādinīs,* who did not marry and pursued their studies throughout life. It is interesting to note in this connection that the list of great Vedic teachers to whom tribute of respect had to be paid at the time of Brahmayajña, includes the names of some ladies, viz. Gārgī Vāchaknavī, Vaḍavā Prātītheyī, Sulabhā Maitreyī.[6]

These evidences, to which others may be added,[7] show that the highest education, including Vedic studies, was open equally to men and women, and many ladies distinguished themselves not only as Vedic scholars but also as great philosophers, debaters and teachers.

It may be stated without any hesitation that the general position and status of Indian women in the Vedic Age was much higher than in any other ancient society that we know of, those of Greece and Rome not excluded. It is hardly necessary to point out that the picture is an ideal one, and cannot be regarded as universally true of all women. The opportunities of higher education could obviously be availed of only by a limited number, and in actual life, the authority of the husband prevailed over the wife in many cases. The rosy picture of the loving union between husband and wife was marred in many instances by discord and disunion, and even conjugal fidelity was not always maintained, being violated on both sides. References to these occur in the *Ṛig-Vedic* hymns, and they may be regarded as normal and inevitable in human lives. But there are a few other features which are not quite normal and require special notice, if we are to understand aright the true position of woman in the Vedic Age.

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[6] *Ashwalāyana Gṛihya-sūtra,* 3. 4. 4.

[7] The education of women is treated as a separate subject in Chapter IV. Cf. also Section II of this chapter.

One sure criterion of the status of woman in a society is the relative feelings evoked by the birth of a son and a daughter. The *Ṛig-Veda* does not say anything direct on this point, but the prayers for ten sons in the marriage hymn, without reference to any daughter, seem to indicate that the latter was less welcome than the former. The *Atharva-Veda* leaves no doubt that sons were preferred to daughters. The birth of a son, rather than a daughter, is the subject-matter of a fervent prayer contained in two hymns (3. 23 ; 6. 11).

But although there was a distinct preference for sons, we do not find as yet, in the Saṁhitā period, a positive aversion to daughters. Consequently there was no question of ill-treating a daughter, and there is not the least evidence of such horrible customs as the exposure of new-born daughters or female infanticide in other ways. Weber's interpretation of a certain passage in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, supporting such practices, has now been proved to be wrong.[8] The passage literally means that while they lift up the body of the male child, they keep a daughter by the side (of the mother) at birth. It evidently means that the child was lifted up in joy, if it was male, but there was no such demonstration, if it was female. It thus generally proves discontent or dissatisfaction at the birth of a daughter, as mentioned above, but nothing more serious.

As a matter of fact, whatever the feeling at the time of birth, it was evidently a fleeting one, and a daughter was as well looked after as a son. She was brought up with all the religious *saṁskāras,* and educated like a son. Some difference was, of course, inevitable. She could not always be sent away for education at a teacher's house, and arrangement had to be made for her instruction at home, by her father, brother, or other persons. Of course, as stated above, some devoted themselves to higher education for life, and they must have been trained at the house of a preceptor like boys.

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[8] Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 8.

Reference should be made to one discordant factor in the married life of women. It was the presence of co-wives. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss the causes of polygamy,[9] either in general, or particularly in Indian society, but there is no doubt that it prevailed in the age of the *Ṛik Saṁhitā.*[10] Oppression or torment caused by rival wives is referred to in the *Ṛik Saṁhitā* (1. 105, 108) which also refers to 'charms' by which one may quell the rival wife and gain the husband for oneself (10. 145. 1-3). There are not, however, enough materials to enable us to measure the extent to which polygamy disturbed the joys of the domestic life or affected the position and prestige of the wife in a family. Polyandry, the counterpart of polygamy, probably also existed in early Vedic society. Although this is denied by many scholars,[11] there are several considerations that may be urged in support of it. In the first place, there is the story of Draupadī. The very fact that the present *Mahābhārata* offers various puerile or mythical explanations of this outlandish form of marriage proves that it was too integral a part of the central theme to be deleted or changed. Even if we may not regard the episode as a historical fact, it is difficult to believe that a story-teller would base the very foundation of the family life of its famous heroes by inventing a pernicious custom absolutely unknown to this country. It is also noteworthy that the Epic mentions two other cases of polyandry and cites the Purāṇa as its authority.[12]

Secondly, the *Āpastamba Dharma-sūtra* (2. 27. 3-4) quotes an old dictum to the effect that "a bride is given to the family (of her husband, and not to the husband alone)" and then immediately adds, "that is (at present) forbidden on account of the weakness of (men's) senses."[13] This undoubtedly testifies to the existence of polyandry in ancient times, and the writer of a *sūtra* (aphorism) is not likely to refer to a pre-Vedic custom in such a manner.

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[9] For a full discussion on this subject cf. Westermarck, *op. cit.* Vol. 3, chs. 27-8.

[10] Cf. 1. 62. 11; 71. 1; 104. 3; 112. 19; 186. 7; 6. 53. 4; 7. 18. 2; 26. 3; 10. 43. 1; 101. 11. P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmashāstra,* Vol. 2, pp. 550 ff.

[11] Kane, *loc. cit.* p. 554; Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 132. But B. S. Upadhya supports the existence of polyandry (*Women in Ṛig-Veda,* p. 112).

[12] *Mahābhārata,* Cr. Ed. 1. 188. 14 (and f.n.).

Thirdly, as Jolly has pointed out, there is an unmistakable similarity between the polyandry of Sanskrit literature and that of the present day, which is much more common than is generally believed. As an instance it may be pointed out that in Kumaon it is customary among the Brāhmaṇas as well as among the Shūdras and Rājputs, that all the brothers marry only one woman.[14]

Lastly, it should not be forgotten that polyandry, in some form or other, was widely spread in ancient times in different climes and among various races of mankind,[15] so that there is nothing inherently improbable in its prevalence in India.

It is, however, quite clear that even if it did exist, it was much less in vogue than polygamy, and that it became obsolete even during the Vedic period; for both *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* and *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* most emphatically assert that while "one man has many wives, one wife has not many husbands at the same time."[16]

But although traces of polyandry are few and far between, there are more copious references to levirate (*niyoga*) which involves a complete deviation from the physical chastity of a woman as we understand it today. It was positively enjoined upon her by the social and religious custom in order to obtain progeny. The *Ṛig-Veda* refers to many instances of children being procreated on other's wives. The impotency of husbands is the usual ground, though other circumstances (such as the imprisonment of the husband) are also alluded to.[17]

This practice of levirate is also alluded to in later literature, and actual instances are given in the *Mahābhārata*. As a matter of fact, the origin of the epic Kuru family, which evidently goes back to the Vedic period, is traced to such a custom.

It stands to reason that what was permitted to a wife was not denied to a widow, and this is expressly mentioned in later literature. However revolting such practices may appear to us, it is only fair to remember that it was not uncommon in ancient times. Besides it shows that the begetting of children was regarded as of greater importance by a family than the physical chastity of its women.

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[13] *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 2, p. 164.

[14] Jolly, *Law and Customs* (Eng. Tr.), p. 104.

[15] Westermarck, *op. cit.* Vol. 3, pp. 116 ff.

[16] Kane, *loc. cit.* pp. 550-1.

[17] Upadhya, *op. cit.* p. 100.

But whatever we may think of polyandry or levirate, there are enough evidences to show that not only in the age of the *Ṛik Saṁhitā,* but even in later Vedic period, the idea of conjugal fidelity on the part of the wife, and the conception of physical chastity of a woman, were very different from those of later days, and on the whole more or less the same standard was adopted in judging them in the case of both males and females. As this point is of great weight in forming an estimate of the status and position of a woman in domestic and social life, it is necessary to dwell upon it at some length, particularly as the common view in this respect is hardly accurate.

The high ideal of a married life—involving lifelong faith, devotion and love between the husband and wife—is nobly expressed in the marriage hymn of the *Ṛik Saṁhitā* mentioned above. Casual references, scattered throughout the work, indicate that the society was really inspired by such an ideal, and we already see before us a picture of that indissoluble partnership, in life and death, which has ever characterized the relation between husband and wife in Hindu society, and has almost become proverbial. Nevertheless, without detracting from this high ideal in the least, it must be confessed that even in those days, as also in later days, the weakness of human nature must have occasionally led to moral lapses. Indeed, there are ample references to such a state of things not only in the *Ṛik Saṁhitā* but also in later Vedic literature. It would be a miracle if it were not so.

There are certain hymns[18] which seem to look upon the existence of a paramour as nothing abnormal. It has accordingly been presumed by a scholar[19] that every married woman might have her *jāra* (paramour). But such a conclusion is not warranted by the particular hymn, which alludes to a possible contingency, rather than a common occurrence or ordinary event. Nor does the general tenor of *Ṛig-Vedic* hymns support such a conclusion. On the other hand, the not infrequent references to *jāra* certainly indicate that illegitimate love was by no means very rare.[20] It is, however, possible that these refer in most cases to unmarried girls rather than married women. Birth of illegitimate children, casting away of the 'unwedded damsel's son,' and even destruction of the foetus, are referred to in the hymns. There is no doubt that such moral lapses were due to the free association of grown-up boys and girls in festivals and other social gatherings. Such unlicensed love was not certainly encouraged by the guardians, and hence we hear of elopements of the lovers.

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[18] *Ṛig-Veda,* 10. 162-6.

[19] S. C. Sarkar, *Some Aspects of the Early Social History of India,* p. 85.

But the hymns of the *Ṛig-Veda* make it clear that moral lapses on the part of women were not treated so severely as in later days, and more or less the same standard was applied in this respect to both men and women. Even wives suspected of having paramours were not denied social and religious rites, far less driven away from the family.[21]

As all this might be quite shocking to our moral sensibilities and ideas of female virtues, it is necessary to point out the prevalence of a similar state of things in the Hellenic world of Homeric days. "The compulsory infidelity of a wife as a prisoner of war was openly recognized, and in no way reprehended."[22] "The noblest and fairest women, whether married or not, of a captured town normally became the concubines of the victors, but such a fate was in no sense a dishonour to the Greek lady of which she need afterwards be ashamed."[23] "This callous attitude may have reflected its influence upon cases of voluntary sin, and so they came to be regarded with much indulgence. So also the open concubines allowed to married men often afforded a plea for retaliation and a justification in the case of crime."[24]

The same reasons might also have operated in ancient India. In any case, ideas in ancient India, as in ancient Greece, were very different from those of modern times, when we rate personal purity of a woman so highly that the loss of it by misfortune is hardly less excused by society than its abandonment through passion.

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[20] Upadhya, *op. cit.* pp. 194 ff.

[21] The same spirit prevailed even in later times. Cf. N. K. Dutt, *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, Vol. 1, pp. 111 ff.

[22] Mahaffy, *Social Life in Greece*, p. 54.

[23] *Ibid.* p. 33.

[24] *Ibid.* pp. 54-5.

In view of what has been said above, it is hardly to be expected that society would impose upon a widow the life of strict fidelity to her dead husband. She was certainly allowed to remarry.[25] But even apart from this, her union with other men was tolerated, and even sanctioned, at least in special circumstances. A hymn in the *Ṛig-Veda* (10. 40. 2) refers, by way of simile, to a widow drawing her husband's brother to her bed. This may refer to a second marriage of the widow or to levirate. It appears from a *Ṛig-Vedic* hymn (10. 18. 8), read along with one in *Atharva-Veda* (18. 3. 1-2), that immediately after the death of a husband, the wife, lying by his side on the funeral ground, was raised by his brother and led back home to become his wife. It may be mentioned in passing that the reference in this hymn to the widow lying by her dead husband on the funeral ground has been taken by some as an allusion to the custom of sati, i.e. the burning of widows along with their husbands. There is, however, no express reference to any such custom or practice in the whole of the *Ṛig-Veda*. But, as the *Atharva* hymn calls such lying down 'an ancient religious duty,' there may be a hint that such practice was not unknown in old times, probably anterior to the age of the *Ṛik Saṁhitā*. It may be mentioned here that the practice of burning widows along with the dead bodies of their husbands was a wide-spread one, even among Indo-Germanic races in Asia and Europe.[26]

The remarriage of a widow to the brother of her husband was a very common practice among the Jews and other ancient nations. But it is apparent that the choice of a widow, in India, was not confined to him. He was probably preferred to others, since it would help the domestic economy and obviate many troubles and inconveniences. But marriage with outsiders was not disallowed. There also seems to be no limit to the number of times that a widow could remarry. A hymn in the *Atharva-Veda* (5. 17. 8) tells us that "even though there were ten non-Brāhmaṇa previous husbands of a woman, the Brāhmaṇa alone becomes her husband if he seizes her hand."

Having passed in review the salient features of a woman's status in the family during the early Vedic period, we may say a few words regarding some aspects of her domestic life.

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[25] *Atharva-Veda*, 9. 5. 28.

[26] Upadhya, *op. cit.* p. 98.

Several words were used to denote a girl, but the term *duhitṛi* was probably the most familiar one, as it is found in almost all the Indo-European languages. The word is derived from the root *duh* (to milk), but opinions differ as to its real interpretation. Some take it to refer to the 'milking of a cow,' while others take it in the sense of 'nourishing the child.' The first meaning undoubtedly seems to be preferable, as it is more natural to associate a maiden with her household duty than to think of her as a potential mother.[27] We may, therefore, hold that tending and milking the cow, and the preparation of butter and ghee, which were such important items of diet in those days, were regarded as chief duties of the girls of the family. Among other duties which are referred to as normal for maidens, are weaving, bringing water in a jar, bringing the *soma* plant and extracting its juice and watching over crops in the field.[28]

But these and other domestic duties did not stand in the way of her education, to which reference has already been made. As noted above, the girls were not married at an early age, and the reference in some hymns to "youthful women without brothers, straying like dames who hate their lords"[29] indicates that the elder brothers exercised some control over the free movements of their grown-up sisters. There are references to the old maid living in her father's house till her death. But such cases were probably very rare. The marriage of girls was thus not obligatory, but the normal condition of life.

We have no detailed references to the different kinds of marriage or the restrictions relating thereto. There is no reference to the degrees of relationship within which marriage was prohibited. A famous hymn in the *Ṛig-Veda* (10. 10) seems to indicate that marriage between a brother and a sister was not regarded with favour, though not altogether unknown.[30] No other restrictions seem to be known.

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[27] *Ibid.* pp. 34-5.

[28] *Ibid.* For pressing of *soma* juice cf. *Ṛ.-V.* 8. 80. Also cf. the next section for outdoor work of women.

[29] *Ṛig-Veda*, 4. 5. 5.

[30] Upadhya, *op. cit.* pp. 117 ff. He also cites Purāṇic traditions in support of this view (pp. 122 ff.).

The parents had no doubt a great amount of control over their daughters in selecting a suitable husband, but the maidens often made their own choice. Recognized festive gatherings, like *samanas*, which were frequented by young men and girls, afforded ample opportunities for love-making, which not unoften ended in marriage. Instances are on record when the parents successfully objected to such marriage even when both the boy and the girl were eager for it.[31]

The *Ṛig-Veda* does not enumerate the different kinds of marriage that are specifically mentioned and described in the later Sūtra and Smṛiti literature. But we find indirect references to most of them. The payment of money to the bride's father, which forms the essence of *ārṣha* and *āsura* forms of marriage, is referred to in several hymns of the *Ṛig-Veda*. The marriage hymn mentioned above undoubtedly refers to a nucleus of the *brāhma* and *prājāpatya* forms, and indicates their general popularity. The germs of *swayaṁvara, gāndharva* and *rākṣhasa* forms of marriage can also be traced in the *Ṛig-Vedic* hymns.[32]

It is hardly necessary to add that child marriage is not referred to in the *Ṛig-Veda,* and everything indicates that girls were normally married after they had attained maturity. The rituals of marriage are referred to in the above-mentioned marriage hymn, and have already been discussed. Some of the essential features of a later age, viz. the bridegroom going in procession to the bride's house with friends and relatives, decoration of the bride, religious ceremonies, kindling of fire, joining of hands, return of the bridegroom with the bride to his own house and other rites performed there—all are indicated in that noble hymn which has portrayed in such a vivid manner both the rituals and the high ideals of marriage in ancient days.[33]

The status of a wife in her husband's family has been discussed above. It is difficult to form an accurate idea of her daily life. Her general duties and responsibilities as mistress of the house probably did not differ much from what we see today. But we cannot form a definite idea of her relations with her co-wives and other members of the family, her actual influence over her husband, if he proved to be a bad one, and other things of this nature. All that can be said is that the general picture of a wife, in the hymns of the *Ṛig-Veda,* is one of dignity and importance, and she enjoyed peace, happiness and prosperity as a rule.

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[31] *Ibid.* pp. 45 ff., 186 ff.

[32] *Ibid.* pp. 65 ff. Upadhya also refers to "a companionate sort of contractual marriage" (p. 71). But this is based only on the story of Urvashī and Purūravas, and cannot be accepted as a general practice. Cf. also Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 57 about contractual marriage.

[33] It is difficult to decide whether and how far the sacraments and rituals were performed in the different kinds of marriage, in *Ṛig-Vedic* days or even in later times.

2. The Later Period

More than two thousand and five hundred years intervened between the *Ṛig-Vedic* Age and the close of the ancient period at about A.D. 1200. Many changes happened in Hindu society during this period. It is inevitable that the status and position of women, too, should have undergone many changes. But it is remarkable that there was, from every point of view, a steady process of decline. We can trace these changes through different stages with the help of the literary sources, which fall broadly into successive chronological periods, such as the later Saṁhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Upanishads, Dharma-sūtras and Smṛitis. But it would be a tedious task to trace the gradual evolution of the different aspects of the problem, step by step, through this vast range of literature, nor would it serve any useful purpose, except to professed students of history. It should suffice for the present to indicate, in a broad outline, how the different aspects of a woman's domestic life, as described above, were radically changed till it reached the form in which we find it at the close of the ancient period—which, by the way, was not materially altered until the introduction of Western ideas brought about a new social era in the latter part of the last century.

In order to emphasize the difference, we may sum up the important features of a woman's family life in the period represented by the *Ṛig-Vedic* hymns. As we have seen above, these hymns refer to the dignified position of the wife, her co-ordinate authority with her husband and her position as mistress of the household. A woman was free in her movements, and attended public assemblies and social entertainments of mixed gathering. Not unoften she wooed her husband in these gatherings. Marriage was usual, but not obligatory, and many women are known to have spent their whole lives in their father's house. Child marriage is nowhere alluded to, and there are clear evidences that girls were fairly developed at the time of marriage. Widows were permitted, nay enjoined, to marry again, and childless widows could have a son by the system of *niyoga* (levirate).

In almost all these respects, the later Hindu society showed a striking contrast to the old. In order to explain these we may begin with the marriageable age of girls, as the change in this respect seems to be at the root of all other unfortunate developments.

From the time of the Dharma-sūtras we find opinions slowly growing in favour of an early marriage of girls.[34] Some of them recommend marriage not later than three years after the attainment of puberty, whereas others shorten the period to three months. The main idea behind this move was to preserve the physical purity, since it was contended that one should select a bride who should not have even dreamt of sexual love. This idea was gradually pushed to its logical conclusion, and marriage before puberty came to be the general rule. Manu, though advocating the marriage of girls even at the age of eight (9. 94), allows considerable latitude in this respect, and declares that "the maiden, though marriageable, should rather stop in (her father's) house until death than that he should ever give her to a man destitute of good qualities" (9. 89). But a later Smṛiti writer advocates the marriage of girls at a very early age, literally speaking, when they could go about naked without indecency (*nagnikā*), and adds that she must be married before puberty, even if no suitable husband was available. The later Smṛiti writers put the age of ten as the limit beyond which marriage could not be postponed without dire consequences to the father. Marriage at eight was strongly recommended by some, while others advocated marriage at any time after the age of four.

Thus pre-puberty marriage became the normal rule, and even infant marriages came into vogue. Instances are not wanting in history and literature of the marriage of girls at a later age, but the general tendency of society to conform to the scriptural injunction can hardly be doubted. The effect of this can be easily perceived. Girls married at an early age could scarcely have received any education beyond the elementary stage. And as marriage came to be regarded as obligatory, they had no opportunity to lead a life of studentship, like *brahmavādinīs* of older age. Thus they were gradually deprived of higher learning, particularly Vedic studies. A lack of knowledge of the Vedas made them unfit to perform sacrifices and the various *saṁskāras* (sacraments). Hence we find that these *saṁskāras,* which were performed alike for boys and girls in the early period, were at first performed for girls without the Vedic *mantras,* and then came to be stopped altogether. The *upanayana* or initiation into Vedic studies having been stopped, women lost the status of a *dwija* or twice-born, and came to be regarded as Shūdras. In course of time they were, like Shūdras, declared unfit for reciting or even listening to Vedic hymns.[35] Two instances may be cited to bring home to every mind the changed position of women in this respect. In the *Bhagavad-gītā,* we are told that "even those who are born sinners, as well as women, Vaishyas and Shūdras may obtain salvation by devotion to the Lord; what to speak of Brāhmaṇas and Kṣhatriyas" (9. 32-3). This idea of the inherent inferiority of women is also emphasized by a commentator on Nārada when he says that women must ever remain dependent on others, because, as they are not entitled to study the *shāstras* (scriptures), they do not know what is proper or what is improper.[36]

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[34] For a full discussion with reference to authorities cf. Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 58-72.

Still more illuminating are Shaṅkara's comments upon a passage in *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* (6. 17). It refers to a ritual to be performed by one who wishes to have a learned (*paṇḍitā*) daughter. Shaṅkara says that *paṇḍitā* here cannot mean 'learned,' because Vedic study is denied to women; so it must be interpreted as skill in household management. The passage shows that down to the age of the early Upaniṣhads women were entitled to Vedic study, and learned daughters were highly prized by parents. This is of course proved by other references in the same Upaniṣhad, notably the stories of Maitreyī and Gārgī Vāchaknavī. The latter took part in a public discussion on a philosophical subject with the great philosopher Yājñavalkya. The former, wife of this great sage, refused to take any share of his property when he was about to retire from home into the forest, but boldly asked him for instruction in the philosophic teachings about immortality of the soul. What a sad contrast between this age and that of Shaṅkara, who could not even conceive that a woman could aspire to higher education!

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[35] Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 241 ff.

[36] Asahāya on *Nārada-smṛiti,* 10. 30.

Manu, who looks upon the daughter as "the highest object of tenderness" (4. 185), and the writers of some other Smṛitis enjoin upon the parents the duty of educating even (*api*) their daughters. The word 'even' is significant. But a young girl married at the age of ten could hardly learn much in her father's house. There were no doubt exceptions, and in some cases, probably in aristocratic families, special arrangements were made for their higher education as also such accomplishments as music, dancing, painting and other fine arts suitable for women. This accounts for the women poets and scholarly women whose names are met with in later literature, and to whom reference will be made in later chapters of this volume. But, generally speaking, the education of women reached a very low level, and ushered in an age when literacy of women was not only unusual but even unwelcome. It is within the memory of us all that the orthodox Hindu society regarded it as not only unbecoming but also inauspicious that a woman should be able to read or write. What a volume of water has flowed down the Gaṅgā since the days of the *Ṛig-Veda*!

Marriage was more or less obligatory upon girls.[37] In order to fulfil this obligation, a part of the family property was set apart for defraying the expenses of the marriage of a girl whose father was dead.

The marriage institution was fully developed since the time of the *Ṛig-Veda,* and eight different forms came to be stereotyped. These may be summed up as follows:[38]

1. The *brāhma,* where the father himself invites a man learned in the Vedas to marry his daughter.
2. The *daiva,* where the girl is married to a priest who officiates at a sacrifice, during the course of its performance.
3. The *ārṣha* where the bridegroom offers a cow and a bull or two pairs to the bride's father.
4. The *prājāpatya,* where the father of the bride addresses the couple with the text, "May both of you perform your duties."
5. The *āsura,* where the bridegroom willingly gives as much wealth as he can afford to the bride and her kinsmen.

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[37] Cf. Altekar, *op. cit.* p. 38. Many of course became nuns under the influence of Buddhism and Jainism. Even married women joined these orders.

[38] The account is based on *Manu-smṛiti,* 3. 20 ff. Cf. Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 41 ff.

6. The *gāndharva,* or the voluntary union of a maiden and her lover.

7. The *rākṣhasa,* where the bride is forcibly carried from her home.

8. The *paishācha,* where a man by stealth seduces a girl who is asleep, intoxicated or disordered in intellect.

The recognition of the last three forms reflects a state of society in which union of any kind was blessed in the form of a marriage. Gradually the last came to be almost universally condemned, and the seventh allowed only in the case of a Kṣhatriya. In general, only the first four alone were approved for a Brāhmaṇa, though Manu (3. 53) and others condemn even the third, for both this and the fifth were looked upon as selling the daughter. The sixth form was obviously out of the question when child marriage prevailed.

The marriage was the turning point in the life of girls. Bereft of any education worth the name, regarded as ineligible for any holy sacraments and religious sacrifices, and too young to exercise any influence on the choice of her husband, the position of the wife in a family steadily deteriorated. Instead of possessing co-ordinate authority and equal partnership with her husband in the management of household affairs, her status resembled that of an obedient servant to her lord. This is well illustrated by the detailed ordinances in *Manu-smṛiti* regarding the relation between husband and wife. As this book is held in the greatest reverence all over India, and the status of the wife envisaged in it actually became the ideal of later days, we need only make a detailed analysis of its views in order to draw up a clear picture of the wife, as theoretically conceived in the later days of ancient India.

In spite of some noble sentiments expressed in general terms about the honour and respect due to women and the necessity of mutual fidelity between husband and wife (3. 55-60 ; 9. 101-2), Manu starts with the fundamental principle that "day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families). Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age ; a woman is never fit for independence" (9. 2-3). As we have seen above, Nārada justifies this on the ground that women, having no knowledge of *shāstras,* are unable to discern what is good and what is bad. Manu, however, goes one step further, and regards women, by nature, as of such depraved character that they are sure to go astray if they are not kept under rigid control. Verses 14 and 15 of Chapter IX in *Manusmṛiti* depict the licentious and grossly sensuous character of women in general in such terms as cannot be reproduced without violating decency and modesty. The creator "implanted in them carnal passions, love for ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice and bad conduct" (9. 17). "Women who are destitute of strength and knowledge of Vedic texts, and for whom no sacramental rite is performed with sacred texts, are as impure as falsehood itself" (9. 18). In view of their inherent wicked character they must be carefully guarded, specially by their husbands, to whom they are naturally disloyal (9. 15-6).

It is only against such background that we can understand the detailed injunctions laid down by Manu for regulating the relations between husband and wife. The cardinal principle is that the wife should ever remain obedient to her husband, must never do anything that might displease him, and, faithful to his memory after his death, should not think of any other man (5. 151, 155-60). "Even though the husband be of bad character and seeks pleasure elsewhere he must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife" (5. 154). "If a wife shows disrespect to a husband who is addicted to (some evil) passion, who is a drunkard, or who is diseased, (she) shall be deserted for three months (and be) deprived of her ornaments and furniture" (9. 78).

A vicious husband must be worshipped, but a bad wife may at any time be superseded (by another wife) (9. 80). Even apart from this the husband may discard the wife on other grounds. "A barren wife may be superseded in the eighth year; she whose children (all) die, in the tenth; she who bears only daughters, in the eleventh; but she who is quarrelsome, without delay" (9. 81). But even though discarded for circumstances beyond her control, she must accept her lot with humility. "A wife who, being superseded, in anger departs from (her husband's) house, must either be instantly confined or cast off in the presence of the family" (9. 83). Elsewhere we read that a wife who has committed faults may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo (8. 299). But, even though discarded, the wife has no right to regard herself as free; for "neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from the husband" (9. 46). Though the widow is strictly enjoined to remain faithful to her husband's memory, there is no corresponding duty on the part of the husband. After having burned a wife who dies before him, the husband may marry again, and again kindle the (sacrificial) fires (5. 167-8).

It is hardly necessary to add that Manu was against levirate and the remarriage of women (9. 65). The former was definitely abolished in course of time.[39] The latter was sanctioned even by Nārada and other later Smṛitis under specific circumstances. If a husband died, was lost, took to ascetic life, became an outcaste, or was impotent, the wife might take another husband.[40] According to Kauṭilya, she might also marry again if her husband was of bad character, or away for a long period, or likely to endanger her life.[41] But these rules soon became more or less dead letters and the remarriage of women became more and more scarce, if not altogether obsolete, in course of time.

Kauṭilya permitted divorce to both husband and wife on the ground of mutual enmity.[42] But it was not permitted in the first four kinds of marriage. This restriction was obviously a later growth. Gradually such divorce, simply on the ground of dislike or hatred of each other, went out of use altogether and is not referred to in any Smṛiti work or other literature.

While the position of the widow was gradually becoming worse and worse, the custom of sati gradually came into prominence.[43] Its non-existence in the Vedic Age is now generally accepted. But we have clear instances of it as early as the fourth century B.C.[44] But gradually it came into prominence. The *Vishṇu-smṛiti* (*c.* 100 A.D.) recommends it on the ground that the "widow can go the way of the departed soul by dying after him." Although some writers strongly condemned it as suicide, others came forward to extol it. Aṅgiras argued that the only course which religion has prescribed

[39] Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 168 ff.

[40] For divorce and remarriage cf. Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 98 ff., 176 ff.

[41] *Arthashāstra*, Bk. 3, ch. 2. [42] *Ibid.* Ch. 3. [43] Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 135 ff.

[44] Diodorus gives a 'vivid account of the wife of an Indian soldier burning herself along with her husband, killed in a battle in Iran in 316 B.C. (*Cambridge History of India*, Vol. 1, p. 415).

for a widow is that of saṭi. Hārīta maintained that the wife can purify her husband from the deadliest of sins, if she burns herself with his remains. Such recommendations, to which others may be added, had the desired effect. The cases of sati became more and more frequent, and developed into that pernicious popular custom which was not abolished till the nineteenth century A.D. The callousness with which writers of the Smṛitis urged the self-immolation of the widows may be regarded as a fair measure of the changed outlook on women in ancient India.

In judging of the degradation of the status of women in the later age, as sketched above, we have to bear in mind several important considerations. In the first place, it is to be noted that some of the Smṛitis contain stray verses expressing more liberal views about the position of women in general, and of the wife in particular, than those contained in Manu and others, whose views ultimately prevailed. These Smṛitis really portrayed what was regarded as ideal or desirable by their brāhmanical authors, and did not always reflect the actual state of things. It is not difficult to cite facts which are at variance with the general conclusions we have deduced from the Smṛitis. Thus we do actually find a number of learned women who distinguished themselves as poets. We have instances of girls being married at a mature age even in the seventh century A.D. But while these facts show that rationality and common sense sometimes prevailed over religious injunctions, these ultimately triumphed and moulded the society. What was merely ideal or desirable became soon stern reality. The Hindu society in the medieval and modern ages has been the creation of these Smṛitis and has most rigidly conformed to them.

In the second place, it would be a mistake to suppose that the authors of the Smṛitis or any other class of men deliberately degraded the position of women. The change was neither sudden nor unexpected, and developed its course during a long period. Thus a gradual aversion to women as a class appears as early as the *Atharva Saṁhitā*, where charms were prescribed for changing the female foetus into a male one. A passage in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* says that while the son is the hope of the family, the daughter is a source of trouble to it. Similar sentiment occurs in various texts of a later age. The reason may be partly economic and partly religious, but the difficulties of suitably marrying a daughter might also have something to do with the growth of this feeling.

We also find a gradually increasing emphasis on women as an object of sensual pleasure. Even the great poet Kālidāsa, who draws an ideal picture of the wife, to which there is hardly any parallel in any literature, excuses the banishment of Sītā by Rāma on the ground that a man prefers fame and glory even to his own body, not to speak of a wife, who is after all an object of sensual pleasure.[45] This stress on the sensual aspect had two important results. On the one hand, great emphasis was laid on the physical chastity of women, leading to child marriage and the dire consequences mentioned above. On the other hand, the ascetic and puritanic ideas which came into prominence about the sixth century B.C. laid stress on the temptations offered by women and regarded them as chief obstacles to salvation. Women came to be looked upon as the source of all evils and as potent instruments of destroying the souls of men. Hence the denunciations of women as a class reached a degree which is not unknown even in other countries. It is well known how Christian monks gathered at the synod of Macon in 585 A.D. seriously discussed whether women were human beings at all.

Even Gautama Buddha was not wholly above this spirit. For a long time he refused to admit women to his religious order, and when he did so, he prophesied that the purity of his religion would not endure for more than half the period that it would otherwise have done. He also imposed a far more rigorous test and placed the nuns as a class in a position of inferiority to the monks. It was laid down, for example, that a nun, though a hundred years old, must stand in reverence even before a young monk just initiated into the Church. Such a sentiment was shared by other religious sects, and naturally reacted on the people at large, thereby creating an unfavourable view against women. These and other reasons must have produced the feeling that women were wicked and sensuous by nature and must be constantly held in check by men. It should be remembered, however, that such a feeling was almost universally held throughout the world down to very recent times. Confucius, Aristotle, Milton, and even Rousseau preached that women, being inherently inferior to men, should always remain in a subordinate position to men.[46]

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[45] Cf. *Raghu-vaṁsha*, 8. 67 with 14. 35. Mallinātha, commenting on the last verse, compares the wife with other objects of enjoyments such as sandal paste and garlands!

Thirdly, it must be noted that in spite of degradation in the status of women and many heavy disabilities imposed upon them, they enjoyed certain privileges and some favoured treatment in ancient India.[47] Women were not to be killed on any account. The daughter of a *patita* (outcaste) was not a *patitā*, though his son was regarded as such. Women had to perform only half the *prāyashchitta* (expiation) that men had to undergo for the same lapse. The *purdah* system had not yet come into vogue. On crowded streets way had to be made for her, and she was exempted from ferry-tax. The wife had an exclusive right over certain properties (*strīdhana*) acquired by her by way of gift, and the husband had no jurisdiction over them save in exceptional circumstances. Some Smṛitis make the husband liable to pay a heavy fine for deserting a virtuous wife. Even for adultery, a penance is prescribed in most cases, after which the wife is restored to all her ordinary rights. Even if a woman were abducted by a *mlechchha* (barbarian) and conceived thereby, she could, according to some Smṛitis, be taken back after some purificatory ceremony. She was generally exempted from taxes. Finally it may be mentioned that as against the strong denunciations of women referred to above, we find some writers making a spirited defence of their character and highly eulogizing them.[48] The following passage in Varāhamihira's *Bṛihat Saṁhitā* is in refreshing contrast with the passages in *Manu-smṛiti, Mahābhārata* and other texts condemning women in unmeasured terms:

"Tell me truly, what faults attributed to women have not been also practised by men? Men in their audacity treat women with contempt, but they really possess more virtues (than men). . . . Men owe their birth to women; O ungrateful wretches, how can happiness be your lot when you condemn them? The *shāstras* (scriptures) declare that both husband and wife are equally sinful if they prove faithless to the marriage vow; men care very little for the *shāstra* (while women do); therefore women are superior to men."

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[46] Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 398 ff.

[47] Kane, *loc. cit.* pp. 572 ff., 595 ff.; Altekar, *op. cit.* pp. 381 ff.

[48] Various passages both in favour of and against women are quoted by Kane (*loc. cit.* pp. 577 ff.) and Altekar (*op. cit.* pp. 381 ff.)

These are noble words and reflect the higher minds of Hindu society, but barring some poets, Varāhamihira's was a solitary voice raised in defence of women in general and in appreciation of their worth.[49]

There is, moreover, one relieving feature in the otherwise dark and dismal picture of women depicted in the Smṛitis. It is the frank recognition of the high position of respect and reverence due to the mother. The Epics, Dharma-sūtras and Smṛitis vie with one another in eulogizing the glory of the mother. She is regarded as the highest of the gurus, exceeding a thousand fathers. The son is to maintain a mother, even though an outcast, while an outcast father may be abandoned. One may avert the consequences of all curses, but a mother's curse can never be averted.[50]

Finally, it is necessary to note that although theoretically the status of women suffered a considerable decline on account of the views and ideals preached in the later Smṛitis, their effect was considerably diminished in domestic life by the natural instincts of men. After all, it is natural for a normal man to cherish affection for his daughter, love for his wife, and respect for his mother. These feelings were sure to prevail in the long run, and counteract to a large extent the teachings of the Smṛitis allotting a subordinate position of inferiority to women. Gradually a readjustment took place, and new ideals animated the women. The position of the wife, as laid down in the ordinances of Manu, became the cherished ideal and played a dominant role in shaping the lives of women in India. It lowered their status as compared with old times, but brought into being a new type of women who are even now looked upon as models. Sītā, who is looked upon today as virtue incarnate and the ideal of Indian womanhood, shines principally as the obedient wife, sweetly administering to the needs of her husband in weal and woe, and bowing down to his will without any question. She willingly followed her husband in his life of exile, and accepted her ordeal by fire and banishment to the forest without any protest.

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[49] Kane, *loc. cit.* p. 579.

[50] For 'the high eulogy of and the reverence for the mother in all Smṛiti works' cf. Kane, *loc. cit.* p. 580.

Such a sweet, loving and obedient wife has been held up as the ideal, and has produced a new type of women in Hindu society. So strongly is the duty of obedience sought to be inculcated into the heart of every wife that even the spirited Draupadī is represented as submitting herself to the worst humiliation that can befall a noble woman, at the mere behest of her husband. The story of Satī emphasizes the fact that devotion to the husband must supersede all other feelings—even filial piety. The ordinances laid down in the Smṛitis, and such ideal women as those mentioned above, portrayed in literature, have moulded Indian womanhood to a new type which has been held as the glory of Hindu culture for more than a thousand years.[51]

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss how far this view may be justified on rational grounds. But it cannot be denied that there is an element of nobility in the sacrifice and self-abnegation of Indian women, and it is impossible to withhold the due meed of praise, even admiration, from that patient and suffering class of humanity. Though deprived of many elements of ordinary human rights and privileges, and not unoften subjected to unmerited sorrows and pangs, they live and die for their beloved ones and hover like ministering angels over every Hindu household. How far such self-surrender and meek devotion or blind love can be regarded as equivalent to, or can compensate for, intellectual enlightenment and other virtues and accomplishments, which are the birthright of every human being, may be a subject of dispute; but it is incumbent on all of us to assess the proper worth and recognize the moral value of a phase of life that is fast passing away after an unchequered existence of more than a thousand years.

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[51] Perhaps the climax is reached in the story of Anasūyā in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Canto 16). She honoured her husband, suffering from leprosy, as a god, and tended him with all care by cleansing the sores. Once at her husband's command she carried him on her shoulders to the house of a courtesan. By her virtues of chastity she could even forbid the rising of the sun!

CHAPTER II

IDEAL AND POSITION OF INDIAN WOMEN IN SOCIAL LIFE

1. Early Vedic Period

In modern times, the social status of a class generally depends upon its education, economic condition and political privileges. In ancient times in India, the social status largely depended upon religious privileges and disabilities. We shall therefore first survey the religious position of women in the Vedic period.

It is pleasing to note that no religious disabilities were associated with the fair sex in India down to the end of the Upanishadic Age, i.e. *c*. 500 B.C. Towards the end of the Smṛiti period (*c*. 500 B.C. to *c*. 600 A.D.), women were eventually declared to be ineligible for the study of the Vedas. In the Vedic Age there is ample evidence to show that they not only studied the Vedas but also figured among the authors of the Vedic hymns. Manu disapproves of the conduct of a Brāhmaṇa officiating at a sacrifice organized by women. But in the Vedic Age many sacrifices like the Sītā sacrifice could be performed by women alone. When the ascetic school got the ascendancy in later times, women were regarded as impediments in the path of salvation ; whereas the Vedic Age regarded a bachelor as an unholy person, unfit to perform a sacrifice. It will be now clear to our readers how women suffered from no religious disabilities at all in the Vedic Age ; only during the monthly period they could not participate in religious life and activities. This was but natural.

Vedic studies began with *upanayana* or sacred initiation, performed usually at the age of eight ; this important ritual was performed as regularly in the case of girls as in that of boys. Sacred initiation and subsequent Vedic studies were almost an indispensable qualification for securing a suitable match.[1] Some women Vedic scholars like Lopāmudrā, Vishwavārā and Ghoṣhā composed hymns that were later admitted into the sacred canon. Usually Vedic sacrifices were to be offered jointly by the husband and the wife. Marriage, however, was not obligatory on women in the Vedic Age, and we come across maidens taking a stalk of the *soma* plant and offering it in a sacrifice to Indra.

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[1] *Atharva-Veda*, 2. 5. 18.

Vedic society, as a whole, did not subscribe to the ascetic view of life ; marriage was essential in order to participate fully in the religious life. In the symbolical ascent to heaven in the sacrifice, the husband is seen calling his wife to accompany him (*Shat. Br.*, 5. 2. 1. 8). The wife took an active part in the daily and periodical sacrifices along with her husband. She had her own hut in the sacrificial compound ; the duty of chanting the Sāman hymns usually fell upon her. The wife used to make the first brick for the sacrificial altar and participate in the consecration of the fire and the offering of the oblations. If the husband was away on a journey, the wife alone performed the different sacrifices which the couple had to perform jointly. There were some sacrifices, however, like the Sītā sacrifice (at harvest) and the Rudra sacrifice (to ensure fecundity among the cattle), which could be performed by women alone.

As women enjoyed the same religious privileges as men and received the same education, their status in the family was nearly the same as that of men. Their status in society also was naturally fairly satisfactory. Many of them were famous scholars and authors. It is rather surprising to find that women were taking an active part in the industrial life of these early times. They were manufacturing arrows and bows, making baskets, weaving cloth and participating in outdoor agricultural work. It is important to note that words like female arrow-makers (*iṣhukartryaḥ*) do not occur in later literature. Among the fine arts, music and dancing appear to have been cultivated by women fairly extensively ; their love for and excellence in these arts were well known. Since women were following many outdoor professions, there was naturally no *purdah* in society. It was hoped that the bride would in course of time be able to command the audience at a public meeting.

Women as kings and political officers do not figure in the early Vedic times. Society was patriarchal ; times were unsettled ; wars were frequent, and much depended upon their successful prosecution.

So, naturally women, who were physically weaker, were regarded as unsuitable for the work of the government.

Let us now survey the legal position of women in this period. The husband and the wife were, theoretically at least, the joint owners (*dampatī*) of the household and its property. In actual practice, owing to the patriarchal basis of the family, the husband enjoyed greater powers. We should, however, remember that a larger number of women were following the gainful professions, and what they earned must have been more or less at their disposal, rather than at the disposal of their husbands. *Strīdhana* (*pariṇāhya*) was recognized, but it consisted of movable property, like utensils, ornaments and apparel, that was given to the bride at the time of the marriage. The widow was not allowed to inherit the property of the husband. Joint families were the order of the day, and so neither men nor women could inherit in their individual capacity. *Niyoga* (levirate) was extensively practised, as was the case with many other contemporary societies. Widow marriages were allowed; there were therefore hardly any sonless widows in society to demand a share in the dead husband's property. The daughter was allowed to inherit, if she was a spinster. Marriage was not yet obligatory for women; brotherless daughters were generally avoided by a would-be son-in-law through the fear that the first son would be claimed by the bride's father. We therefore find references to such daughters claiming and getting a share in the patrimony, though they may have had brothers. Married daughters, however, were not allowed any share in the patrimony; the son is expressly asked to refuse a claim in this connection, since his sister belongs to the family of the husband. Probably, however, she got the patrimony, if she had no brothers, and was the only surviving member of a joint family. Such cases, however, were few; for the joint family consisted of the father, grandfather, uncles, cousins, etc. A married daughter was very rarely its sole surviving member.

The position of women was on the whole satisfactory during the period. No one dreamt of reducing their status to that of the Shūdras, because they had exactly the same privileges about Vedic initiation and Vedic studies as men. The Aryans were at this time engaged in the arduous task of political expansion; women in Vedic India, as those in Homeric Greece, were actively co-operating with men in their work by manufacturing bows, arrows and cloth and participating in agriculture. The free labour of enslaved population was not yet available, nor was it yet possible to admit non-Aryan wives in Aryan households. Women were no parasites in the Vedic Age; they were useful and wealth-producing members of the society; their co-operation was valuable in securing prosperity in peace and victory in war. They could not therefore be treated with an air of patronage or contempt. In the Vedic literature there are a few observations like 'women have a fickle mind.' They, however, reflect the light-hearted cynicism of some poets, and do not embody the considered opinion of the leaders of society.

The ideal before women in social life was to help society in procuring prosperity in peace and victory in war. The war of expansion required a numerous army; women cheerfully accepted the responsibility of rearing a large family with ten sons for each mother. Besides doing the household work, as women have got to do all over the world, they used to devote their spare time to agriculture, spinning, weaving and manufacturing war materials. They were keen to make their own contribution to the literary and religious life. They did not lag behind men in education; many women in cultured classes were also authors, some of whose poems have been included in the Vedic canon. They enthusiastically performed the Vedic sacrifices, hoping thereby to secure divine favour, so necessary for the prosperity of society.

2. BRĀHMAṆA-UPANIṢHADIC AGE

(*c.* 1000 B.C. TO *c.* 500 B.C.)

The political expansion of the Aryans was completed in northern India during this period, and their position became unchallengeable. A section of the conquered population had been reduced to a semi-servile position, and its cheap labour was available for a number of manual professions. This is probably the reason why the services of women were no longer requisitioned for the manufacturing of bows and arrows during this period. In agricultural labour also, women ceased to take any active part. Spinning and weaving was something like a home or cottage industry, and women continued to take a more active part in it than men. On the whole, women became less productive members of the society, and that indirectly lowered their status.

The religious privileges of women, however, continued to be more or less unaffected during this period. Their *upanayana* continued to be performed as before, and they were offering the daily Vedic prayers like men. At the time of Rāma's installation as *yuvarāja* (the crown prince), we find his mother Kausalyā busy in performing the various sacrifices to secure him good luck. Tārā was doing the same when her husband was about to begin his duel with Sugrīva. The *Rāmāyaṇa* describes Sītā as daily offering her evening Vedic prayers. Vedic sacrifices continued to be offered daily to Fire by wives during the absence of their husbands.

During the early Vedic period, the father was usually the teacher of his children; during this succeeding age the professional teacher (*āchārya*) came into existence. Some of the educated women of this period are seen taking teaching as a career and were called *āchāryās* in order to differentiate them from wives of teachers, who were called *āchāryānīs*. Girls' education was usually done at home, as in the earlier period, by their fathers, brothers and uncles; some, however, went to outside teachers; a few of them lived in boarding houses known as *chhātrīshālās*. Some women of this period continued the tradition of the earlier age of participating and distinguishing themselves in the learned assemblies.

Vedic studies were gradually falling into the background during this period; but some women took an active interest in them. Women scholars specializing in the Mīmāṁsā school of Kāshakṛitsna were called *Kāshakṛitsnās*. Philosophical studies were becoming more and more popular; many women like Sulabhā, Gārgī and Maitreyī took keen interest in them. Some of them were discarding the pleasures and prospects of married life in favour of a life of asceticism. Nuns existed in Indian society, though in small numbers, even before the rise of Buddhism. They participated in learned philosophical discussions. The questions asked of Yājñavalkya by Gārgī were the most difficult and searching ones. Ascendancy of asceticism was gradually increasing in society and marriage was beginning to be regarded as incompatible with spiritual life.

The prejudice of the earlier age against women as rulers continued in this age also. Queens and dowager-queens like Gāndhārī, Draupadī, Kausalyā and Kuntī exercised considerable influence in the family councils of kings; but no women figure as ruling queens or administrative officers in the Epics and Purāṇas. After the Great Bhārata War, Bhīṣhma is no doubt seen advising Yudhiṣhṭhira to sanction the coronation of the daughters of the deceased kings, in case they had left no sons. But it is doubtful whether such a practice was really followed. The general opinion of society was that on account of their natural limitations, women could not become efficient kings and administrators.

Proprietary disabilities of women continued to be what they were in the earlier period. The widow could not inherit the property of her husband, nor could a daughter that of her father, if she had brothers. There is a passage in the *Nirukta,* a work of about the seventh century B.C., advocating equal rights of inheritance for sons and daughters. But this passage is a clear interpolation of a later period. *Strīdhana* rights continued to be what they were in the earlier period.

Purdah system was unknown to this, as to the earlier age. Some new notions were gradually getting established in society, which were eventually to affect the position of women profoundly. In the earlier period, Vedic literature was not regarded as revealed. It was studied in the same way in which we study the devotional songs of medieval saint-poets today. We commit some of these songs to memory with a view to reciting them off and on. But we are not very particular about each original word. A difficult or an archaic word is often set aside in favour of an easy and current one. We are anxious for the gist of the song and not for its actual words. Vedic hymns were mastered in the same way for several centuries by ordinary men and women. During this period, Vedic literature was canonized; it was regarded as revealed; it represented the very word of God, and therefore it had to be preserved in its pristine form. If there was a single mistake in accent or pronunciation, or if a Vedic *mantra* was misapplied, it would not only fail to procure the desired result but would also encompass the destruction of the reciter. This canonization of the Vedic literature necessitated its prolonged study with meticulous care for about twelve years at least. *Upanayana* or sacred initiation took place at about the age of ten, and boys could master the literature by completing the curriculum at about the age of twenty-two, when they married. The marriageable age of girls had to be about five or six years earlier than that of boys; their marriage therefore could not be postponed to much beyond sixteen or seventeen, if their husbands were to be twenty-two or twenty-three. Vedic studies of the new exacting type, however, could not be completely finished before the age of sixteen or seventeen during this period, and therefore they remained incomplete at the time of the marriage of girls. Probably women learnt only a part of the Vedic literature like most of the men, but tried to study it thoroughly. But the percentage of women who were masters of the entire Vedic literature was much smaller than that of men.

During this period, the supremacy of the Aryans over the non-Aryans became completely established. The Indian Aryans ceased to be that sturdy race which they had been in the earlier period. They became more pleasure-loving than they had been before, and the marriageable age of boys and girls began to be lowered. Legal works written at about 500 B.C. recommend that girls should be married at the time of puberty; if no suitable husbands were available, the marriage was permitted to be postponed by about three years. This reduced the average marriage age of girls to fourteen or fifteen and shortened the period of *brahmacharya* (studentship) training by six or seven years.

The Vedic literature refers to very few marriages of the Aryans with non-Aryan women. In the *Mahābhārata,* which may be taken to represent the life in the age under discussion, epic heroes like Bhīma and Arjuna are seen to marry non-Aryan women like Hiḍimbā and Ulūpī. As the contact of the Aryans and non-Aryans became closer and closer, such unions became more and more common. This practice eventually had a bad effect on the status of Aryan women, as will be shown presently.

3. SMṚITI-PURĀṆA PERIOD

(1) *c.* 500 B.C. TO *c.* 600 A.D.

The gradual effects of the new tendencies referred to above began to manifest themselves after about 500 B.C. The marriageable age of girls which was about fourteen or fifteen at *c.* 600 B.C. began to be lowered further and further. The three years' period of grace after puberty that was permitted in the beginning for performing the marriage was gradually withdrawn. Smṛiti writers of about 200 A.D. advocate girls' marriages at puberty, at about the age of twelve. Easier and more pleasure-loving life of the age was only one reason for this change. Canonization of the Vedic literature was another. Growing complexity of the Vedic sacrifice was a third. In the earlier periods Vedic literature was smaller in extent; it became more extensive now with the addition of the Brāhmaṇa and the Upanishadic literature. Vedic sacrifices became much more complex, and a good deal of time had to be devoted during *brahmacharya* to master their details. Full mastery of the Vedic lore thus required a close and exacting study of about sixteen years at least. Boys could find the necessary time for it before their marriage at twenty-four, but not girls before their marriage at fourteen or fifteen. It is true that not all the Brāhmaṇas or *traivarṇikas* (upper three castes) could devote, or did devote, this long period to complete the mastery of the Vedic studies. But while invariably there was a respectable number of Brāhmaṇa male students mastering the Vedic lore, there were hardly any girl students who were Vedic experts among those who were undergoing the Vedic *upanayana* at about 400 B.C.

Early during this period (*c.* 400 B.C.) the *upanayana* of girls thus became a formal *saṁskāra* (sacrament), not followed by any serious course of Vedic studies. For some centuries, however, society was anxious for the continuance of the sacrament. One of the lost *sūtras* (aphorisms), quoted by later writers, points out that if *upanayana saṁskāra* was not performed in the case of women, they would become Shūdras. This would be a calamity, for how could *traivarṇikas* (i.e. Brāhmaṇas, Kṣhatriyas and Vaishyas) be born of Shūdra mothers? Not being followed by any serious effort at Vedic studies, *upanayana*, however, soon became a mere formality, and writers at about 300 B.C., like Manu, began to advocate that it might be performed in the case of women, but without the recitation of Vedic *mantras*. *Upanayana* without Vedic *mantras* was a contradiction in terms, and society gradually began to feel that this formality should be dispensed with altogether. Yājñavalkya (*c.* 300 A.D.) does not allow *upanayana saṁskāra* to girls, nor do the later Smṛiti writers, though some of them admit that the custom of *upanayana* of girls did prevail in earlier ages. The marriageable age of girls had been reduced to about twelve at the time when they were declared ineligible for *upanayana*. We find Manu and Yājñavalkya starting a new theory that the *saṁskāra* of marriage could well serve the purpose of the *saṁskāra* of *upanayana* in the case of the girl ; her husband was to be her guru ; his service was to be the substitute for guru-*sevā* (service of the preceptor), and household management was to serve the purpose of sacrificial duties.

The discontinuance of *upanayana* and its equation with the marriage ritual had the most disastrous consequences upon the social and family status of women. The privilege of *upanayana* had been consistently denied to non-Aryans since early times, and when it was withdrawn from women, their status was automatically reduced to that of the Shūdras. At about 300 B.C., it began to be argued that women were ineligible for Vedic studies like Shūdras. To argue that women could not read a literature part of which had been composed by women themselves, was rather strange. But it was the logical conclusion of the discontinuance of the *upanayana saṁskāra*.

In the two earlier periods, the domestic sacrifices were performed by the husband and wife. Even in periodical sacrifices, women used to sing Sāman songs, though in course of time men also began to discharge this duty. When *upanayana* of women became a mere formality at about 300 B.C., there arose a school, led by Aitishāyana, which advocated that wives should not be associated with their husbands in the performance of Vedic sacrifices. This was a revolutionary though logical view, and so society as a whole was not prepared to accept it. Jaimini came forward to defend the old tradition permitting the association of the wife in the sacrifice. But while doing so, he admits that the wife can stand no comparison with the husband ; the former is ignorant, while the latter is learned.[2] This enigmatic statement sums up the position which was responsible for the deterioration of the status of women. In the Vedic marriage ritual, the hope was expressed that the bride would rule over her new household ; in the Smṛiti marriage ritual, it was asserted that the wife was to be to the husband what a pupil was to a preceptor. When *upanayana* became a formal *saṁskāra*, women in general ceased to offer Vedic prayers (*sandhyā*) and sacrifices.

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[2] *Pūrva-mīmāṁsā*, 6. 1. 24.

During the present period, it is true that even when *upanayana* and Vedic studies were discontinued, girls in cultured families continued to receive literary education. Some became poetesses and authoresses, and we have the works of a few of them handed down to us. But their presence in society was co-existent with a general illiteracy among women. The case was exactly similar to that at the beginning of the twentieth century, when there were a few educated women in Indian society, although the mass of women was steeped in illiteracy and ignorance. When uneducated girls began to be married at the age of ten or twelve, they naturally had no voice in the choice of their husbands. The custom of *swayaṁvara* (marriage assemblies) gradually disappeared, though it existed among the Kṣhatriyas even in the next period.

From about 300 A.D., the average bride even in the cultured sections of society was much less educated than her husband. Being married early she had no opportunity of free development; her mental and intellectual growth was stunted, and therefore she was not only inferior to her husband in education but also often narrow in her outlook. This almost universal inferiority of women to men was responsible for the theory advocated by Manu and other writers of the perpetual tutelage of women. Asahāya, a commentator of *Nārada-smṛiti,* justifies this doctrine on the ground that women, not being eligible for higher studies, cannot by themselves have an adequate knowledge of what is proper, as it depends upon a familiarity with the *shāstras* (scriptures).[3] They must therefore be under the tutelage of men, who are better educated and have a developed mind and intellect.

It will thus be clear how far-reaching were the consequences of the discontinuance of *upanayana* and Vedic studies on the status of women in society. They not only became much inferior to men in education and culture but were also reduced to the position of the Shūdras. The full effect of this development became pronounced towards the end of this period (*c.* 600 A.D.), but it was further aggravated during the millennium following.

The ascetic ideal got gradually growing ascendancy in Indian society with the rise and spread of Buddhism and Jainism. This adversely affected the position of women. It is curious to note how male saints all over the world vie with one another in attributing all sin and misery to the existence of woman. In the *Yoga-vāsishṭha,* Rāma, when about to renounce the world, is made to observe how woman is the chain of all miseries and say: "Desire for enjoyment will arise only when one has a wife; otherwise he would be free from it. If a man renounces the woman, he renounces the world; if he renounces the world, he would surely be happy." Another writer observes that the woman is the seed of the tree of existence and a torch illumining the path to hell; she is the quintessence of sorrow, cause of quarrel and mine of miseries. Writers of the ascetic school in the West have also made similar observations about women. According to Socrates, "woman is the source of all evil." Tertullin says, "Woman is the gate of hell and mother of all evils." Another Father says, "O assembly of women, you are mostly of the hell on the day of the Resurrection. You are the Devil's gateway. You destroy God's image, man." It is interesting to note that women saints like the authoresses of the *Therī-gāthā* have refrained from passing similar slanderous remarks on man, though he is usually the seducer of woman and not *vice versa.*

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[3] *Nārada-smṛiti,* 10. 30.

It appears that the writers of the ascetic school were painting woman in very black colours, not so much because they believed in what they said, but because they wanted to dissuade men from marriage and family life. Varāhamihira expressly states that the Renunciation school was accustomed to decry women with the above end in view.[4] The net result of this tendency to attribute all ills in society to the presence of women in the world was to lower her social status more and more.

The customs of divorce and remarriage were discontinued during this period, partly owing to the ascendancy of the ascetic idea. The widow had an opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of the family life when she was married. But since a cruel destiny had put an end to her family life by taking away her husband, she should now think rather of the next world than of this. Of course a similar advice could have been dinned into the ears of the widower. But it was not done, largely because the writers were usually men and not women.

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[4] *Bṛihat Saṁhitā,* 74. 5.

Vedic religion was fast falling into the background during this period, and its place was being taken by the Smārta-Paurāṇika religion. It is pleasing to note that women were not debarred from participating in the Smārta family sacrifices and Paurāṇika *vratas* (observances). As a matter of fact, they rather than men were almost the sole custodians of the new popular Paurāṇika religion that was gaining a footing in this period and was destined to get an ascendancy during the following millennium.

Buddhism, which became fairly popular during this period, used to admit women as nuns to participate in higher spiritual life. The psalms of the Buddhist nuns, which have been handed down to us, reveal their striking achievements in the spiritual sphere, and are replete with their religious experience. Nuns could become teachers of female novices, but not of male ones; they were given a position inferior to that of men in the monastic administration. Nuns figure prominently in western Indian cave-inscriptions as preachers and donors down to the third century A.D. From the fifth century A.D. they ceased to be admitted to the Buddhist Order.

Nuns were not prominent in the Hindu religious life. Manu no doubt permits a *vānaprasthin* (recluse) to retire to the forest along with his wife, but such cases were few. Hinduism later withdrew the permission given in this respect and declared that *sannyāsa* (monasticism) was not permissible to women in the Kali Age.

Marriage began to be regarded as obligatory for girls during this period, and they were usually married at the age of twelve. The average woman scarcely received any education. Under the circumstances it was but natural that there should hardly be any women in society who were following careers. In cultured society, there were some women who had made a mark as authors and poetesses; but we do not come across any women teachers. Some women were also cultivating music and dance; but that was for the benefit of themselves and their families. It was not possible for them to follow music and dancing as a profession. Only hetaeras could do so, and they formed a respectable class in society, if we are to trust the evidence of literature. Spinning and weaving were the mainstay of women in misfortune, who had to make their living on the death of their husbands. During this period, we do not come across any women ruling as queens in their own rights.

Dowager-queens were not rare, and some of them, like Nāyanikā and Prabhāvatī Guptā, ruled over large kingdoms for long periods in an efficient manner. We do not find any women officers taking part in the administration of the kingdom during this period. *Purdah* custom began to raise its head during this period, but it was for a long time confined to a few royal harems. It was not followed by society as a whole.

While the position of the woman in the family and society was thus becoming less and less satisfactory during this period, it is gratifying to note that in the sphere of proprietary rights, it was gradually improving. The daughter's right to inherit the property of her father in the absence of a son was universally recognized as before. The question of conceding this right to the unmarried daughter even when she had brothers did not arise, because marriage had become obligatory for women during this period. Brothers were required to set apart from their patrimony a sufficient portion for the expenses of a proper marriage of their sisters. The right of the mother and grandmother to inherit the property of an issueless son and grandson continued to be recognized. The main progress recorded in this age was in the recognition of the widow's right to inherit the property of her husband, if he had separated from the joint family prior to his death. The writers of the *Dharma-sūtras,* who flourished about 400 B.C., did not recognize the widow's right. The same is the case with Manu (*c.* 300 B.C.), who allows the property of a sonless person to devolve upon distant *sapiṇḍas* (kinsmen entitled to make funeral offerings to the same ancestors), or even upon his teachers and pupils, but not upon his widow.

Gradually, however, society began to feel that this arrangement was unjust. During the first half of this period (*c.* 500 B.C. to *c.* 100 A.D.) the customs of *niyoga* (levirate) and remarriage went out of vogue. Leaders of society began to feel that if a widow was not to marry or have a son by *niyoga,* she ought to be assigned a suitable share in the family property to enable her to live honourably. Early writers were, however, inclined to assign her only a maintenance. Kauṭilya, for instance, allows the state to resume the estate of a sonless person, but makes the widow's maintenance a charge upon it.

This arrangement, however, was felt to be unfair to the widow. Why should she get only a maintenance and not the full share of her husband? We find the widow's right to inheritance first advocated by *Vishṇu-smṛiti* (*c.* 100 B.C.), which definitely lays down that the widow shall inherit the whole estate of the husband on the failure of sons. About a couple of centuries later, Yājñavalkya joined Vishṇu in championing the cause of the widow's right of inheritance. It is his authority that was relied upon by the British courts when they recognized the widow's right to inherit the property of the husband. It appears that, since early times, the Yājñavalkya school was more favourably inclined to recognize women's right than was the case with other schools of jurists. In the Upanishads, we find another Yājñavalkya proposing to divide his property equally between his two wives on the eve of his retirement to the forest-life.

The proposal of Vishṇu and Yājñavalkya to recognize the widow as an heir was a revolutionary one. It adversely affected the rights of coparceners and the state on whom the property of an issueless person used to devolve formerly. It therefore aroused considerable opposition down to *c.* 1000 A.D. Writers like Nārada stoutly opposed the new reform; they unequivocally declared that the property of an issueless person should ultimately escheat to the crown, who was required merely to make provision for the maintenance of the widow during her lifetime.

During this period there were some writers who while admitting the old law to be unsatisfactory, were not prepared to recognize the widow as a full heir to her husband. They proposed half-way measures. Some of them recommended that the widow should be allowed to inherit property worth about rupees two thousand or three thousand in addition to the *strīdhana* (personal property) that may have been allotted to her. Others thought that she should be permitted to inherit the movables only. A third view was that the widow should be a deferred heir only; she should be allowed to inherit only on the failure of brothers-in-law and parents-in-law. The law remained vague on this point down to the end of this period. In some localities, the widow's right was recognized; in others it was not.

The scope of *strīdhana* was clearly defined for the first time during this period. It usually consisted of gifts received from near relations at any time and from non-relations at the time of the marriage. This was the view of Manu and Yājñavalkya, but later writers were inclined to increase its scope. Devala, who probably lived at *c*. 600 A.D., includes maintenance, ornaments and accidental gains in *strīdhana* ; women, however, had not the complete right of disposal over this extended *strīdhana,* as they had over the original one, which was technically known as *saudāyika*. Wages earned by women and gifts received by them from strangers were also not included in *strīdhana*. The inclusion of wages in it would have upset the budgets of the family, women from which were usually the wage-earners. It would have been against the peace of the family to encourage the women in them to receive gifts from strangers. It was for these reasons that these two items were excluded from *strīdhana*.

(ii) *c*. 600 A.D. TO *c*. 1800 A.D.

Proprietary rights excepted, there was a further deterioration in the position of women in all other spheres of life. The formality of *upanayana* (sacred initiation) was continued during the last period down to *c*. 200 A.D. It was completely stopped during this period, and the religious status of women, even of the Brāhmaṇa class, was universally recognized to be as low as that of the Shūdra. This disqualification for the Vedic studies and sacrifices did not inflict any actual hardship on women in practical life ; for even men, though theoretically qualified, had given up the Vedic studies in favour of the new branches of knowledge like Kāvya (poetry) and Dharma-shāstra (jurisprudence), which had become popular at this time. Vedic sacrifices, in which women could not participate, were rarely performed even by men. But the stigma of ineligibility for *upanayana* unfortunately reduced the status of women to that of Shūdras, and it had far-reaching effects upon their social position.

The Paurāṇika religion prescribing a number of *vratas* (religious rites) and *shāntis* (palliative rites) rose in ascendancy during this period. It is pleasing to note that women were regarded as fully qualified for it. As a matter of fact, the new *vratas* that became popular at this time were more common among women than among men. Women were its real custodians. Classical Sanskrit, in which the Purāṇas and Smṛitis were written, ceased to be intelligible by *c.* 1000 A.D. Vernaculars gradually rose into prominence, and the Epics and Purāṇas, translated into them, used to be expounded every morning in the village temples by the local Paurāṇikas from *c.* 1500 A.D. The audience was overwhelmingly that of women. Women thus became the real custodians of the religion, which had pronounced them to be outcastes as far as Vedic privileges were concerned.

Most of the women in society were uneducated at this time and therefore incapable of understanding the subtle intellectual arguments advanced by the new schools of the Vedānta like the Adwaita (Monism), Vishiṣhṭādwaita (Qualified Monism) and Dwaita (Dualism), that had risen into prominence from *c.* 1000 A.D.. The Bhakti (devotion) school, however, became very popular by *c.* 1500 A.D., and women became its ardent admirers and followers. Owing to the absence of higher intellectual training, women became remarkably credulous by temperament, and the marvellous stories popularized by the Bhakti-mārga (cult) were detrimental to the growth of discriminative reason. Men, however, were as credulous as women at this time. Among the saints of the new Bhakti-mārga several women occupy a high position; Mirābāī of Rājputānā and Janābāī of Mahārāṣhṭra will long continue to cast a charm on us by their songs of intense devotion.

Widows of higher classes were prohibited remarriage during this period, and most of them led a life of rigid austerity, devoting themselves to the service of the family and society. They were living embodiments of devotion, self-sacrifice and disinterested service, and were highly respected in society. The continuance of the old religious vein, moral fervour and spiritual tradition is largely due to the zeal, sincerity and devotion of Hindu women of the medieval times. Those very women whom religion had treated as outcastes eventually enabled it to tide over most difficult times.

Prior to *c.* 600 A.D. higher literary education was received by a small minority of girls belonging to the families of ministers, officers and landlords. Their number became smaller still during this period. With the establishment of the Muslim rule, the old aristocracy, which had a love for learning, disappeared, and its place was taken by a new one, which had not the same solicitude for culture and education. Literacy during this period was confined to a few women in the Rājput and Brāhmaṇa families; it was common also among prostitutes and dancing girls. By the beginning of the nineteenth century hardly one woman in a hundred could read in the country. Nay, to be able to read and write was somewhat disreputable, since women of ill fame as a rule were well versed in the three R's. Though Indian women were unlettered at this time, they were not uncultured. In fact, books being rare and costly, traditional learning and culture could be acquired more easily from the lips of a preacher than from the pages of a manuscript. Women who attended the expositions of the Purāṇas were often more cultured than men who were literate.

The cultivation of the fine arts like music and dancing was also discouraged among women. During *c.* 500 to *c.* 1000 A.D., girls in cultured families were taught music and dancing, but in course of time these arts also became practically monopolies of the hetaera class. Temple dancing girls, who became common in this age, were also recruited from the same class. A number of women could secure employment in the extensive royal harems of this period as betel-bearers, chowry-bearers, flower-bearers, etc. They usually belonged to lower classes, and it was not always easy for them to lead a life of purity.

Apart from the hetaera class, few women followed any career. Women teachers were practically unknown in this period. Some women figure as authors down to the tenth century; among them we may mention the names of Vijayāṅkā, Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā and Devī. Women authors, however, disappear from our view from *c.* 1000 A.D.

Medicine was followed by a few women as a profession down to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A treatise on women's diseases, written by a lady doctor, was translated into Arabic in the eighth century. But the number of lady doctors was infinitesimally small, and the profession was usually picked up by widows in some doctors' families. Spinning continued to be the usual mainstay of women in misfortune.

Girls in royal families used to be given both military and administrative education during this period. Queens by their own right were rare; but we get many instances of dowager-queens like Vijaya-bhaṭṭārikā of the Chāḷukya family (*c.* 650 A.D.) and Sugandhā and Diddā of Kāshmīr (10th-11th centuries) administering extensive kingdoms as dowager-queens. In Chāḷukya administration several queens and princesses, like Akkādevī, a sister of Jayasiṁha III (*c.* 1025 A.D.), Mailādevī, a queen of Someshwara (*c.* 1050 A.D.), Lakṣmīdevī, chief queen of Vikramāditya VI (*c.* 1100 A.D.), were working as governors of districts or cities. We do not, however, find any lady governors in any kingdoms of northern India. In Rājputānā princesses used to take active part both in war and administration even on critical occasions. Kurmā Devī, the widow of King Samarsi, took active part in organizing resistance to the invasion of Qutbuddīn in *c.* 1195 A.D. The moving and inspiring address of Karṇāvatī, a widow of Rānā Saṅga, rekindled patriotism in a sullen nobility and was responsible for the strong resistance that was offered to Sultan Bahādūr Shāh of Gujarāt at Chitor. Jawāhirbāī, another widow of Rānā Saṅga, fought at the head of the army and died on the battle-field defending the fort. In Marāṭhā history Tārābāī of Kolhāpur and Ahalyābāī of Indore played a prominent and creditable part. Women were usually successful administrators. An Anglo-Indian officer had observed to J. S. Mill that if a Hindu principality was vigilantly and economically governed, if order was preserved without oppression, if cultivation was extending and people were prosperous, in three cases out of four, he found it to be under a woman's rule. It is interesting to note that women were proving successful administrators at a time when their general social position and status had deteriorated in society. The reason is not difficult to seek. Careful steps were taken to train princesses in administration ; their marriages also used to take place at the relatively advanced age of fifteen or sixteen. No education was given to the average woman to enable her to distinguish herself in other walks of life.

The marriageable age of ordinary girls was reduced to eight or nine during this period, and they practically received no education. Their position vis-a-vis their husbands' therefore deteriorated considerably. Widowers of the age of forty to forty-five had to marry immature girls of eleven or twelve, and very often they found the temptation of keeping concubines irresistible. Denied the benefits of education, brought up in the authoritarian atmosphere of the house of the mother-in-law, having no opportunities to develop their natural capacities and faculties, women became helpless, illiterate, narrow-minded and peevish. The theory of the perpetual tutelage of women became more and more deep-rooted in society.

With the advent of the Muslim culture, by *c.* 1200 A.D. the *purdah* system became fairly well grounded in northern India in the higher sections of the Hindu society. It became stricter and stricter in course of time; a hundred years ago, a father-in-law could not confidently identify his daughter-in-law, since he had no opportunity to see her face. The *purdah* custom was practically unknown in the Deccan with the exception of the ruling families.

The forcible conversions of men and women that were often carried out by Muslims from *c.* 700 A.D. further intensified the miseries of Hindu women. Early Smṛitis have definitely stated that if a woman was criminally assaulted, she was not to be socially ostracized; they recommend her readmission into the family and society after some penance and purification. This procedure was followed in the beginning in the case of women forcibly converted and violated. *Devala-smṛiti* goes to the extent of declaring that women of this unfortunate category should be readmitted to the fold of Hinduism, even if their violation was followed by pregnancy. This liberal view-point was, however, given up by *c.* 1000 A.D. From that time onwards Hindu women, once carried away by force into the fold of Islam, had no hope of return to the religion of their birth. They had to reconcile themselves with their captors and live a miserable life, not much differentiated from concubinage.

The proprietary rights of Hindu women improved considerably during this period. A daughter's right of inheritance was not generally recognized, if she had brothers. Only one writer of this age, viz. Shukra, allows a daughter to have a share equal to half that of her brother. It is doubtful if this theory at all became acceptable even in a small section of society. All other writers lay down that brothers should spend an adequate amount for a proper marriage of their sisters, and that this amount should in no case be less than one-fourth of their own individual shares.

In the case of *strīdhana* (a woman's private property), its scope was enlarged during this period. Before *c.* 400 A.D. it usually consisted only of gifts received at the time of marriage; maintenance and accidental gains were included in it a little later. By *c.* 1100 A.D., commentators like Vijñāneshwara began to plead that all property acquired by a woman should be included in it; property acquired by inheritance, partition, adverse possession, etc., would all become *strīdhana* according to the Mitākṣharā school. Women, however, were not allowed the right of disposal over this property. They could only enjoy its income. The Dāyabhāga school of Bengal did not accept this amplification of *strīdhana*, but it allowed women the right of disposal over *strīdhana* in the older and narrower sense of the term.

We have seen above how at about 600 A.D. the Smṛiti writers were sharply divided as to the recognition of the widow's right to inherit her husband's property. This conflict of views continued for some centuries during the period under discussion also. Bhoja (*c*. 1025 A.D.), for instance, was not prepared to allow the widow to inherit the property of her husband unless she was ready to submit to *niyoga* (levirate). This custom had become obnoxious, and a widow would have incurred infamy by submitting to it. So Bhoja had practically denied the widow the right of inheritance by the condition that he had attached to it.

The Reformers' school among the Smṛiti writers continued to press for the universal acceptance of the widow's right of inheritance. Bṛihaspati, Prajāpati and Kātyāyana were its chief exponents. It is unfortunate that these Smṛitis have been lost, and that we have to be content only with quotations from them in medieval digests. But these quotations show that the widow's right was defended with great zeal and skill. Bṛihaspati argued that the husband and wife together constitute one juristic personality according to the *shāstras*. A man therefore cannot be said to be completely dead as long as his wife is alive. How, then, can property pass on to another in the lifetime of the widow? Prajāpati points out that the widow has a natural right to inherit *all* her husband's property, including movables, immovables, bullion, ornaments and stores. Her right is not in the least affected by the presence of her husband's male relations. She will of course show them proper respect, but nevertheless hold the property in her own possession. If any male relation obstructs her peaceful enjoyment of the property, it is the bounden duty of the king to punish him as a thief. Jīmūtavāhana, the Bengalee jurist of the twelfth century, cites further arguments in support of the widow's right. There is no authority to hold that the ownership in the husband's property, which the widow undoubtedly acquires at the time of her marriage, terminates at the husband's death. How, then, can it be argued that the wife's right in the husband's property is destroyed the moment she is widowed? These arguments are undoubtedly very cogent. There were, however, earlier texts going against the right of the widow. They were explained away as referring to concubines or unchaste wives.

In spite of this able advocacy of the widow's right, it was not recognized throughout the country down to the twelfth century. The property of issueless males used to escheat to the state, and it did not take kindly to the recognition of the widow's right. In Gujarāt King Kumārapāla first conceded the widow's right to inherit her husband's property in *c.* 1150 A.D., and his court poet rightly claims that he showed a magnanimity that was not evinced by earlier kings like Raghu, Nahusha and Nābhāga.

Widows' right of inheritance became universally recognized in India by *c.* 1200 A.D. In the Dāyabhāga school of Bengal, widows of even unseparated coparceners could get their shares. In the Mitākṣharā school, however, the right was conceded only to the widows of husbands who had separated before their deaths. There is now an agitation to extend the Dāyabhāga law in this respect to the whole of our country, and before long it will achieve its goal.

From *c.* 500 A.D. the sphere of women's activity became confined to the home and family. Owing to various causes which have been discussed already, the position of women deteriorated considerably almost all along the line. It is true that women as a general rule received similar and often even worse treatment in contemporary times in several countries both in the East and the West; but this can hardly be a sufficient consolation or justification for us, who had earlier evolved quite satisfactory standards about the treatment of women. It is true that there was no female education worth the name even in the West down to the middle of the nineteenth century; but that would not condone its neglect by us who had once realized its benefits and advantages. It may be that child marriages were quite common in many countries in ancient and medieval periods; but that will not prevent us from regretting that we abandoned the earlier custom of post-puberty marriages. It may be that seclusion of women was common in some European countries for several centuries; but that is no justification for our blindly following the lead of the Muslim conquerors.

We should also remember that it was only a handful of pandits who, under the influence of theological theories, regarded women as of the same status as the Shūdras; to the ordinary man, however, they were symbols of purity, self-sacrifice and spirituality. They were the custodians of national culture and religion. Widows may have been regarded as inauspicious on occasions of festivity, but they were revered by their sons and controlled their household as its head. Whatever was noble in Hindu culture, devotion, self-sacrifice and service of humanity, was all embodied in the typical Hindu widow. Instead of clamouring for the right of remarriage, she resigned herself to her lot and led a life of service and self-sacrifice. She was the fountain-head of culture to the children of the rising generation. It has to be admitted, however, that Hindu society was on the whole unfair and unsympathetic to women during the last two thousand years. The average woman no doubt led a contented life, fondled by her parents, loved by her husband and revered by her children. But her happiness was more frequently spoilt in this period than ever before by the prohibition of the widow marriage, the revival of the sati custom and the growing prevalence of polygamy and supersession. It allowed the husband to trample the marriage vows quite openly, but insisted that they should be followed by the wife, even if her husband was a moral wreck. Society's attitude towards women was one of patronizing condescension. They could have no education worth the name and could hardly take any part in social and public life.

We have already shown how there were sufficient causes for this deterioration of the general position of women. Society was more or less a helpless witness of the unfavourable changes that were taking place owing to the prevailing notions about the canonical nature of Vedic literature, about the intrinsic superiority of the ascetic view and ideals of life, and about the watertight nature of caste distinctions. It could hardly help these notions adversely affecting the position of women. It has to be admitted that it enthusiastically extended the proprietary rights of the widow, though it affected the rights of the male coparceners and the state.

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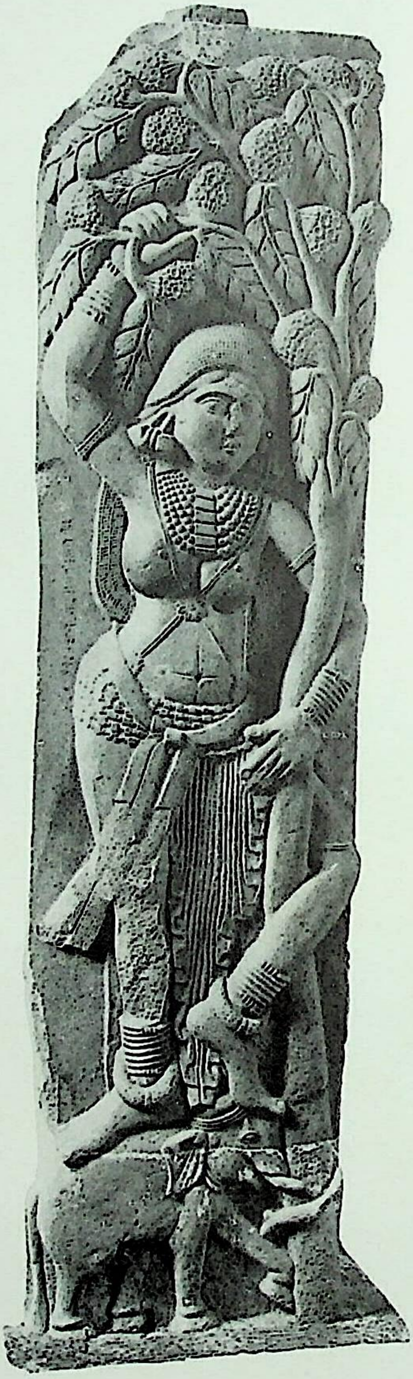
Hindu society has now realized that it has to alter its attitude towards women in the changed circumstances of the modern age. Determined efforts are being made for the spread of education among women. They have begun to take active part in public life and the *purdah* has practically disappeared. In spite of scriptural texts to the contrary, society is trying to popularize post-puberty marriages, and it will soon succeed in making them general. In spite of the express prohibition of the Smṛitis, it was a Hindu reformer of the fifties of the nineteenth century who piloted the bill for the legalization of the widow marriage. The anomalies in the marriage law which prohibited divorce and allowed polygamy have been removed in some states, and others will soon follow suit. The proprietary disabilities of women have been partly removed, and strong agitation is going on to eliminate them altogether. It may be confidently hoped that her position both in the family and social life will soon become fairly satisfactory. It is heartening to note that men in modern Hindu society are even more determined than women to bring about this change.



CHULOKOKĀ DEVATĀ
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CHAPTER III

EVOLUTION OF MOTHER WORSHIP IN INDIA

1. The Place and Origin of Mother Worship in India

Mother worship in India presents a very important but intricate aspect of the history of Indian thought as expressed in her philosophy, religion, general art and literature. A close scrutiny of the course of evolution of this Mother worship in India will show a wonderful assimilation of widely heterogeneous elements, which seem to have combined in later ages to give rise to a body of cognate legends and traditions and a similar trend of theological, if not philosophical, argumentation. Mother worship in India had a chequered history, deriving or developing new colour and tone in the course of its passage through the Purāṇic ages ; new ideas of the Mother associated with new forms of worship developed and established themselves against the older background. Amidst all the diversities of notions and beliefs, the unity of the religious purpose aimed at by the real worshippers of the Mother—the *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants)—was maintained.

Belief in some form or other in the mother goddess is to be found in the good old days of many of the races, Semitic, Hellenic, Teutonic and Nordic alike. But what singles India out in this matter is the continued history of the cult from the hoary past down to the modern times, and the way in which the religious consciousness, developing and deepening round this Mother concept, has influenced the thoughts and ideas of the whole nation through the ages.

Whether based on our primitive emotions of wonder and awe, or on our crude or refined value-sense, the element of anthropomorphism has, according to the anthropologists, to be recognized as a motive force behind all religious phenomena. Mother worship with ceremonies and ritualistic practices, according to them, developed as a religious function under a particular social environment based on a predominantly matriarchal social system, where

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the mother was the central figure or the nucleus of the social structure. Two factors were mainly responsible for this important position of the mother in the primitive society: first, the economic role of women, and second, the absence of any rigid law or system of marriage, leaving a wide field for promiscuity. Children, as social entities, had their social description or status mainly with reference to the mother, and inheritance was also in the line of the mother. This dominant position of the mother in society made her a symbol, as it were, of power, social and economic. It may therefore be presumed that when men of these matriarchal societies, inspired by their primitive emotion of wonder and awe, began to conceive of any higher supernatural being, they conceived it in the image of the mother.

Coming to the question of the evolution of Mother worship in India, it has been pointed out by a school of anthropologists and sociologists that the whole cult with all its heterogeneous and theological fabrications may be regarded as a contribution to the complex texture of the Hindu religion and culture mainly, if not solely, by the pre-Aryans, or the non-Aryan aborigines. They hold that the major portion of what is known today as the Shakti cult or the Mother cult of India developed when the social, cultural and religious admixture among the Aryans and the aboriginal non-Aryans was almost complete through a long process involving contact, conflict and compromise. The Vedic religion, they would contend, is characterized by a predominance of the male gods, where mother goddesses may be said to be almost conspicuous by their absence or unimportance. This, they hold, is mainly due to the then prevailing patriarchal system in the Indo-Aryan society. Some again have held that traces of the mother goddess as a consort of the father god (Shiva) are found in the Indus Civilization, by which is meant the probable pre-Aryan civilization hypothetically constructed on the finds of Mohenjo-daro and Harappā. Accepting this working hypothesis that there existed at least in some parts of India a rich pre-Aryan civilization, it has been suggested that the nucleus of the mother goddess is to be found in female figurines, some supposed to be images of the Earth-goddess, and some the protoform of the later direful goddess—Mother Ḳālī. About the supposed Earth-goddess it has been said, "Now, it is well known that female statuettes akin to those from the Indus Valley and Balūchisthān have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries between Persia and the Ægean, notably in Elām, Mesopotamia, Transcaspia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, Cyprus, Crete, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt."[1] The obvious suggestion is that this probable mother goddess of the Indus Valley presents no isolated history of Mother worship, but indicates the existence of a widespread religious belief.

It will, in our opinion, be hazardous under the existing condition of our knowledge to assign to that hypothetical non-Aryan civilization the origin of the Mother cult of the Indo-Aryans. There is no gainsaying the fact that the matriarchal structure of society had a great deal to do with the development of the religious consciousness and practices gathering round the Mother cult. Nobody will, we think, be so orthodox as to refuse to recognize the contribution of the aboriginal and other pre-Aryan races in the development of the Mother cult of the Hindu religion. We must not be led to hold superstitiously that the word non-Aryan or indigenous is almost synonymous with the word savage or barbaric. We should also carefully note that whatever is non-Vedic is not necessarily non-Aryan, and that the Vedas may not represent the whole of the old Aryan culture.

2. PROMINENT MOTHER GODDESSES IN THE VEDIC LITERATURE

To trace the evolution of Mother worship in India we shall begin with the Vedas, since they are the earliest written records of the religion, literature and civilization of India. The Vedas, as we have hinted before, are dominated by the male deities, and the female deities who make their appearance are often given but a secondary place.

(I) ADITI

As one who had a great possibility of becoming a mother goddess of the Vedic period, mention may first be made of the goddess Aditi. She is often, if not always, described as the mother of the gods (*deva-mātā*). She is not only the mother of the gods; she is at times described as the Mother of the universe. This tradition of Aditi being the mother of the gods is found continued even in the Purāṇas; but in the religious history of India, Aditi could not at any period establish herself as a popular mother goddess.

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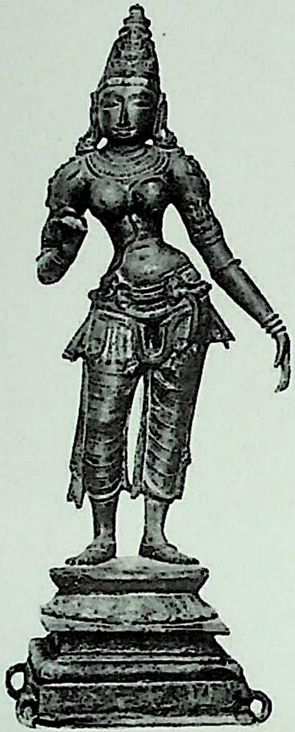
[1] *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*, edited by Sir John Marshall, Vol. I, p. 50.

(II) PṚITHIVĪ

From the point of view of the evolution of Mother worship, the most important goddess seems to be the Earth-goddess, who has been invoked as the 'Great Mother.' It has to be noted that when Mother Earth is invoked or entreated, she is seldom praised alone, but is almost inseparably related with Father Heaven (Dyaus); yet it has to be admitted that the greatness and grandeur of Mother Earth commanded reverential praises from her sons, with whom the offering of songs was the real worship. "Great is our Mother Earth" (*Ṛig-Veda,* 1. 168. 33) was the exclamation of the Vedic poets. Father Heaven and Mother Earth were invoked to bestow on men a luxuriant growth of crops, food and riches; they were invoked to redeem them from all great sins and also to vouchsafe prosperity, happiness, valour, progeny and longevity. They were entreated to protect the people in war, and it was added, "Let not Mother Earth get angry with us at any time." All motherly feeling, tender affection, generosity of heart and forbearance were attributed to Mother Earth, of whom the poets were proud to be the children, and the vastness, variety, resourcefulness and fertility of Mother Earth find innumerable patterns of expression. We find a further development of this idea of Mother Earth in the hymn to the Earth of the *Atharva-Veda* (12. 1. 1-18), where it is said, "Truth and greatness, the right and the formidable, consecration, penance, Brahman (Supreme) and sacrifice sustain the Earth; . . . she (the Earth) bears the herbs of various potency—let the Earth be spread out for us, be prosperous for us. On her are the ocean, the rivers—the waters; on her all food and plough-fields; on her flourish those that breathe and stir; . . . let that Earth grant us all prosperity. The immortal heart of this Earth, covered with truth, is in the highest firmament—let that Earth assign to us brilliancy, strength, in highest royalty. On her the circulating waters flow the same, night and day, without failure—let that Earth yield us milk; then let her sprinkle us with splendour . . . Earth is Mother, I am Earth's son. . . . Thou hast become great, a great station; great is thy trembling,



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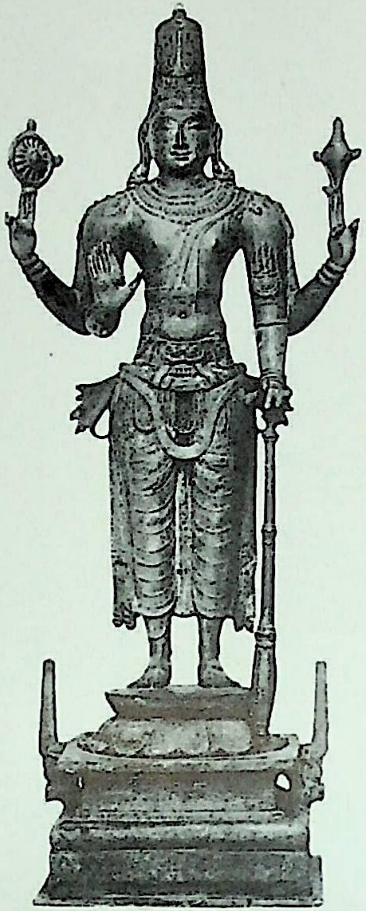

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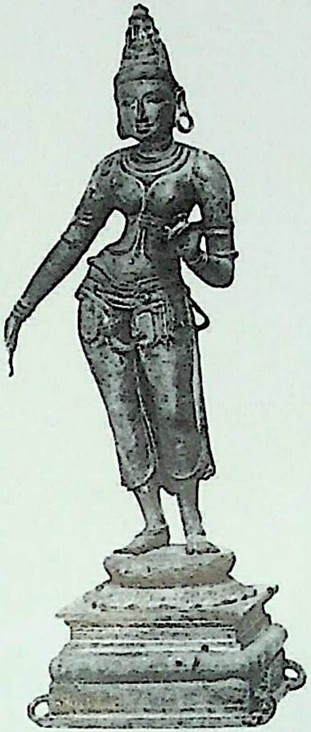

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stirring, quaking; great Indra defends thee unremittingly. Do thou, O Earth, make us shine forth as in the aspect of gold; let no one soever hate us."[2] In this tone of intimacy and reverence had the sages bowed down to Mother Earth and paid her homage.

The idea of the Sky-Father and the Earth-Mother may, however, be said to be a common feature of all the ancient religions. Fertilizing of the Earth-Mother by the Sky-Father through the rains is a common belief acquiring a religious significance almost from the dawn of human civilization.

Attention has further been drawn to the fact that the belief in and worship of this Mother Earth may be taken as a dominant feature of the religions of most of the aboriginal tribes of India. But having regard to the fact that this belief in Mother Earth, even as an article of faith, was almost a common belief with the ancient people, there is no necessity for affiliating the Vedic conception of Mother Earth to a similar conception in Indus Civilization, or the post-Vedic development of the idea in Indian religions to the similar belief in the aboriginal tribes.

So far as the Vedic pantheon is concerned, Mother Earth had, indeed, but a minor place in it; but in spite of this, she deserves our attention because in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* Sītā, the most exquisite and at the same time the most suggestive symbol for agriculture, is depicted as the daughter of Mother Earth and coming to man directly from her when man was furrowing the field. In some of the finest poems of Tagore on Mother Earth the same Indian mind manifests itself.

In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (8. 5) the earth is identified with Shrī; in some of the later Upaniṣhads also the earth has been identified with the goddess Shrī or Lakṣhmī, the goddess of harvest and fortune. As the goddess Shrī, the earth has been eulogized as the sovereign goddess and homage has been paid to her. In the Purāṇic literature the earth has frequently and variously been described as an aspect of the Shakti or the Great Mother. The earth is also described as a power or Shakti associated with Viṣhṇu (cf. Bhū-devī), and in the sculptural representations of Lord Viṣhṇu of the Gupta period and a few centuries following it, the goddesses who are found associated with Lord Vishṇu on his either side are Shrī and Bhū, or sometimes Shrī, Bhū and Nīlā. In these representations of later times Vishṇu seems to retain something of the old Vedic Sun-god, and Shrī and Bhū may stand for two aspects of the Earth-goddess, the aspects of prosperity and productivity.

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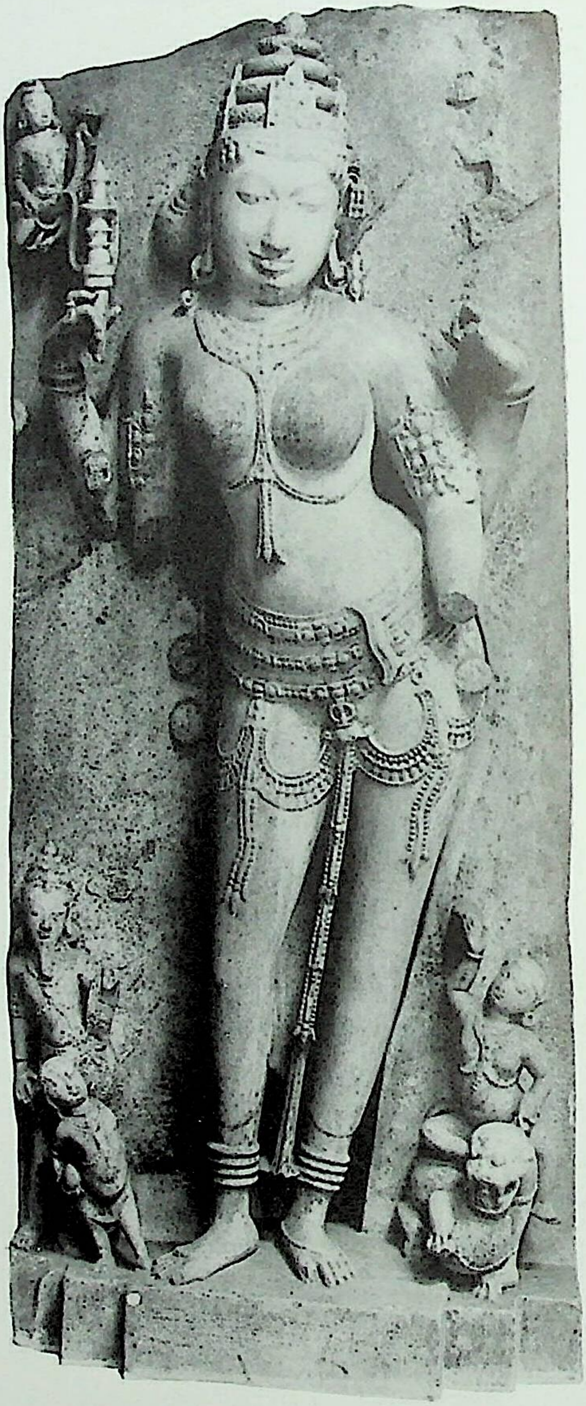
[2] The hymn is given in portions. The English rendering of W. D. Whitney has been followed with alterations here and there.

In spite of the myths and legends that shroud the origin of Durgā in the Purāṇas, and in spite of the philosophic grandeur she acquired, the paraphernalia of her worship that are prevalent in India—and particularly in Bengal—betray an amalgam of the Purāṇic goddess with the Earth-goddess. To be brief, we may incidentally mention a few striking features. The first is that the annual worship of the mother goddess in her various aspects begins in autumn, which marks the beginning of the harvest season in Bengal. To the common run of people in Bengal, the goddess Durgā is popularly known as the autumnal goddess. In the autumnal worship of the goddess her first representative is the branch of a *bilva* (*Aegle Marmelos*) tree in which the goddess is to be first awakened. In the next stage the representative of the goddess is the Navapatrikā or something like a female figure made with a plantain tree and eight other plants and herbs. In the worship of this Navapatrikā hymns are uttered in praise of all the plants and herbs separately, identifying the mother goddess with each of these plants and herbs. Mother has often been identified in her worship with rice (*dhānya-rūpā*), the staple food of a substantial portion of the Indian sub-continent. An epithet of Durgā is Shākambharī, which means 'the herb-nourishing goddess.' She is worshipped also as Annapūrṇā or Annadā, which means the goddess of food. During the spring she is worshipped as the spring goddess (Vāsantī Devī). In the autumnal worship of the goddess in the form of Lakshmī, the goddess of harvest and fortune, the aforesaid Navapatrikā is taken in some parts of Bengal as the best representative of the goddess and, as a matter of fact, is worshipped as the goddess. All these will go to prove how the Mother, in later times, was identified with the harvest goddess and the goddess of fertility, who again is nothing but a particular aspect of Mother Earth.

Another important fact already noted by prominent scholars is that the Mother Durgā or Chaṇḍī of the Purāṇic Age has often been styled as Bhrāmarī or Bhramarī, i.e. the female bee ; this also



SARASWATĪ

Courtesy : The British Museum, London

seems to be due to an unconscious identification of the goddess Durgā with the Mother Earth. In the Vedas, Mother Earth has variously been associated with honey; she yields honey, she discharges honey, overflows with honey, she is honey herself. Being thus the depository of all sorts of honey (water, milk, juice, etc.) she was conceived as the bee. As a matter of fact, "the Earth appears in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* as identical with *saraghā,* and *saraghā* is the bee according to the *Amara-kosha.*"[3]

It is customary in some parts of Bengal to worship on the last day of the month of Pausha (i.e. mid-January) the presiding deity of one's ancestral abode and corn fields; though the deity in the Brāhmaṇical version is a male deity, she is a female deity with many of the village people. It may be noted that at the end of summer and the beginning of the rainy season a religious vow (Ambuvāchī) is observed (specially by Hindu widows), when cooked food is strictly prohibited so as not to hurt or disturb Mother Earth, who is believed to be then in her periods. Probably, after summer, the first rain makes Mother Earth ready for conceiving the next crop, which fact has been religiously construed as above.[4] Villages in many parts of India abound with local village deities, popularly known as Grāmadevatās, who are most frequently female deities. It has been suggested that probably many of these represent some form of Mother Earth originally worshipped by the non-Aryan aborigines. Thus the worship of Mother Earth in India has a continuous history from the Vedic times.

(III) SARASWATĪ

Of the other Vedic goddesses, particular mention may be made of the goddess Saraswatī, who is one of the most important goddesses of India still worshipped on a wide scale. Originally she was an important and sacred river in the *Ṛig-Vedic* Age, and then she became a river-goddess. The cool, transparent and tasteful water of the rivers was frequently compared to the milk of the affectionate mother, which nourishes men as their best drink, both being signified by the same word *payas*. This tendency of holding the rivers as mothers, coupled with the tendency to deify them, seems to have been responsible for the origin and development of the worship of the river-goddesses of India. The river Gaṅgā (Ganges) is ceremoniously worshipped as a mother goddess, and in some parts of Bengal her worship forms an essential part of the religious ceremonies that accompany the matrimonial function in an orthodox Hindu family. A series of legends in the Purāṇic Age has made the Gaṅgā a full-fledged mother goddess, associated in one way or another with the Trinity—Brahmā, Vishṇu and Shiva, and it is sincerely believed by a large section of the Hindus even today that one will attain eternal peace if one can pass the last few hours of one's life half-immersed in the waters of the Gaṅgā. We may note here the other Hindu custom of consigning the ashes of the cremated body to the holy water of the Gaṅgā. The river Yamunā (Jumna) is mythically associated with the Sun-god as his daughter, but her prestige as a goddess seems to rest more on her association with the heavenly cowherd Kṛishṇa, who had his love-dalliances with the cowherdesses of Vṛindāvana on the bank of the Yamunā.

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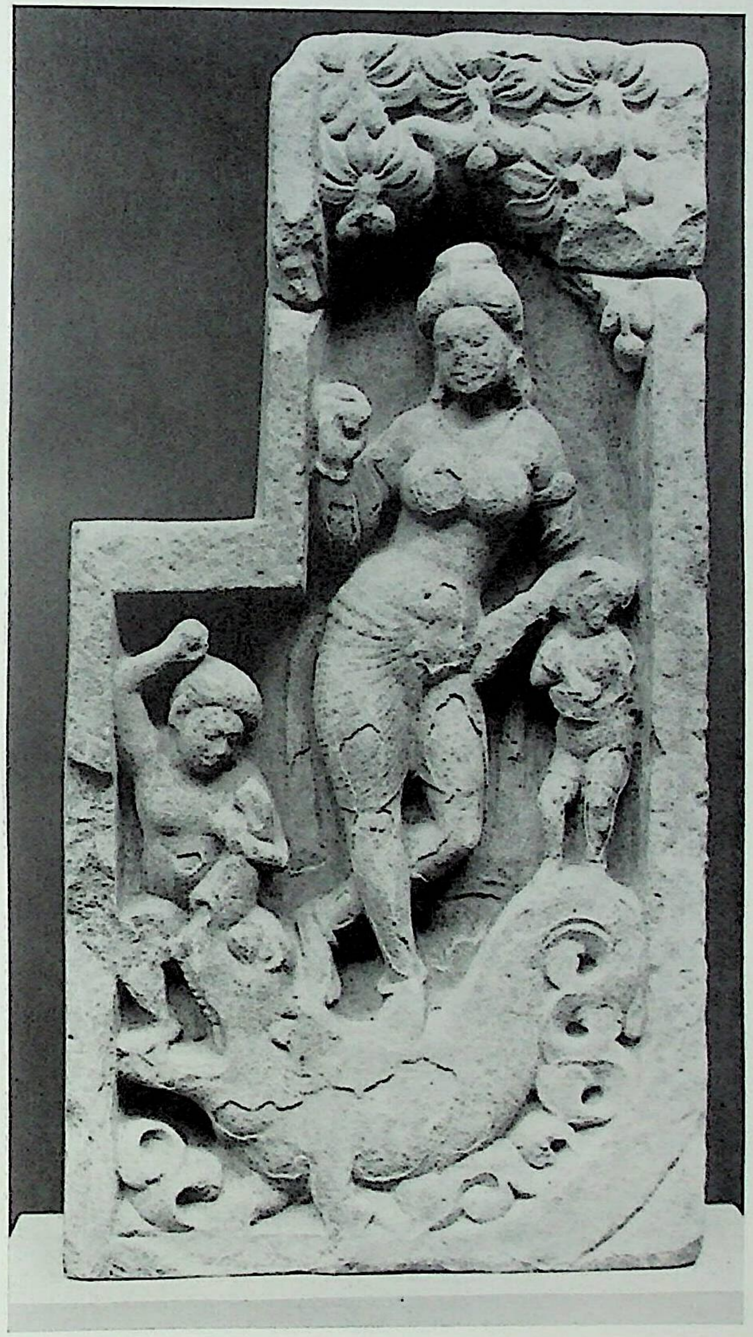
[3] S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess.*

[4] Originally, however, the rivers became red with *gairika* (red-yellowish) particles carried from the hills, and the red flow of the rivers was conceived as the menstrual flow of the Mother Earth. In Bengal the 7th Āṣhāḍha (about the 21st June) is the fixed date for the starting of the Ambuvāchī.

The historical development of the river Saraswatī took a different course. The hymns in praise of the river Saraswatī in the *Ṛig-Veda* and the homage paid to her often induce one to believe that Saraswatī was not always regarded as a mere river ; there was a latent belief in a presiding deity over the river. In one verse of the *Ṛig-Veda,* Saraswatī has been praised as the best among the mothers, best among the rivers and best also among the goddesses, and as such she had a share in the oblations offered in the sacrifices. In the next phase of her evolution we find her identified with *vāch* or word, and that became the turning point in her evolution as the goddess of learning not only in India but also in some other neighbouring or eastern countries like Tibet, Java and Japan, where stone images of the goddess have been discovered. It is philosophically held that the river Saraswatī represents the stream of knowledge of the Eternal One, and as such she is the Logos, the Indian synonym for which is *vāch,* and thus could Saraswatī, the river, be identified with *vāch*. In the Vedic literature the goddess Saraswatī is often associated with two other goddesses, Iḍā and Bhāratī ; the commentators have sometimes interpreted the three goddesses as three aspects of the same goddess



GANGĀ
Courtesy: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

of speech. It is said that at one time both the Gandharvas (celestial minstrels) and the gods tried to win over the Vāg-devī by pleasing and propitiating her by songs and by playing on the lyre. These legends will give us the clue as to how Saraswatī began to evolve as the goddess of learning and of all fine arts in later times.

Saraswatī is generally described as a snow-white goddess with white garments, and everything associated with her is white in keeping with her purity. In her most widely accepted icon of the present day she is seated on a white swan as her vehicle (*vāhana*).[5]

In the age of the Purāṇas the tendency was, as in the case of all other mother goddesses, to have the conception of Saraswatī assimilated with the conception of Shakti; as a result Saraswatī was conceived as a particular aspect of the one all-pervading Power—the Great Mother. The most famous and sacred of all the *mantras,* composed in the *gāyatrī* metre and daily recited many times by brahmins, "We meditate on that venerable divine lustre of the Lord who is the generator of all—the earth, the intermediate atmosphere and the heaven: may He direct our intelligence!"—became personified later as the goddess Gāyatrī, as the wife of Brahmā (the primordial Creator), and as the mother of the four Vedas; and in later days this Gāyatrī became identified with Saraswatī, the Vāg-devī.[6] According to one interpretation, the goddess Gāyatrī is the luminous emanation (*bhargas*) of the infinite power of the Original One in three aspects in the three parts of the day, viz. as Gāyatrī in the morning, as Sāvitrī at noon and as Saraswatī in the evening.

As the goddess of learning she is sometimes said to be the daughter of Brahmā—the original creative agent—emanating from his mind (*mānasa-kanyā*); she is again described as the wife or the Shakti of Brahmā, and as such, she has, like Brahmā, the swan as her carrier. Somewhere she is described as emanating from the mouth of Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa, somewhere as the daughter of Shiva by Durgā. In the worship of Mother Durgā in autumn, Lakṣhmī and Saraswatī accompany the Mother as the two daughters ; or the three may represent the Shaktis of Shiva, Viṣhṇu and Brahmā. As Shakti, Saraswatī has been associated with each of the Trinity—Brahmā, Viṣhṇu and Shiva—by turn. Saraswatī finds a place as an important goddess in Buddhism as well as in Jainism with varying iconographical details. In later Buddhism, however, she is generally associated with Mañjushrī, the god of learning. In the Buddhist liturgical texts she is variously described as Mahā-Saraswatī, Āryavajra-Saraswatī, Vajravīṇā-Saraswatī, Vajra-Sāradā, etc. She presents a variety of names and iconographical differences in Jainism as well.

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[5] Though Saraswatī as the goddess of learning of later days is said to possess the swan as her *vāhana,* the swan is not the only *vāhana* of the goddess throughout the ages. Images of the goddess have been discovered where the lion is the *vāhana*; again in some images found in south India the goddess is found seated on the peacock; the lamb is also found as the *vāhana* of the goddess, and lambs were often sacrificed to her. These betoken her diverse affinities.

[6] It may be pointed out in this connection that the word *Saras* which is the first component part of the word Saraswatī was taken by some of the commentators as a synonym for lustre; according to that interpretation Saraswatī means the goddess of lustre.

(IV) SHRĪ

It will not be out of place, we think, to make here a brief survey of the evolution of the worship of another mother goddess, Lakṣhmī or Shrī, the goddess of wealth and beauty. Her origin is traced to the fifteen verses, known as the hymn to Shrī (Shrī-sūkta), found appended to the regular collection of hymns of the fifth book of the *Ṛig-Veda*. These verses were referred to in the old texts of the early Pañcharātra Vaiṣhṇavas and in many of the older Purāṇas. In the Shrī-sūkta the goddess Lakṣhmī or Shrī is described as of the colour of a red lotus, seated on a red lotus and wearing a garland of red lotuses, and is herself called the deity of the lotus (Padmā). She is approached through the sacrificial fire to bestow on her devotees gold and domestic animals like cows and horses, to vouchsafe health, wealth, a good harvest, beauty, name and fame. The *Agni Purāṇa* traces four hymns of the goddess in the four Vedas. In the *White Yajur-Veda* (31. 22) Lakṣhmī and Shrī are said to be two wives of Āditya ; we find a corroboration of it in the Taittirīya school also. The *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa* makes Lakṣhmī emanate from Prajāpati (Brahmā). Originally, however, Lakṣhmī or Shrī was most probably a harvest goddess, and as a matter of fact we find her identified with the earth in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. Reference to the worship of Shrī is found in the *Dharma-sūtra* of Bodhāyana. She is referred to in a few verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Images of Shrī or Lakṣhmī are found in Bharhut and some other Buddhist centres; her image and reference are found in a seal and some inscriptions of the Gupta period.[7] It seems that the worship of Lakṣhmī as a mother goddess became established during the Gupta period.

The history of the mother goddess Lakṣhmī seems to have taken a bifurcated course. On the one hand she became associated with Viṣhṇu (as the all-pervading ultimate Lord) as his Shakti; on the other hand she seems to have come down to us in her original nature as the harvest goddess as associated with Mother Earth. The annual worship of the mother goddess falls on the autumnal full-moon day (known as the Kojāgarī Pūrṇimā), when, in some parts of the country, she is worshipped in the Navapatrikā referred to before. She is described in her worship as of the nature of corn and regarded as the presiding deity of the domestic realm as well as the corn field. A good number of Hindus, particularly the womenfolk of the family, worship her as the domestic goddess of fortune and beauty. A vow is often observed in Bengal every Thursday in the evening, when all womenfolk of the family gather to recite versified stories proclaiming the power and glory of the mother goddess. In social and domestic life, women of gentleness and beauty, of unimpeachable character and other domestic and social virtues, are often respected as incarnations of the goddess Lakṣhmī herself.

The philosophic conception of the mother goddess Lakṣhmī is first found elaborately expounded probably in the literature of the Pañcharātra school of the early Vaiṣhṇavas. Here Viṣhṇu as Vāsudeva (the all-pervading Lord) is the Supreme Being who possesses infinite power in the form of knowledge, will and activity. This all-pervading power of the all-pervading Lord is Lakṣhmī. Though ultimately one and the same with the Lord, she presents a semblance of duality in non-duality. In the Purāṇic literature we have a mass of legends and speculations concerning the origin of the goddess and her exact nature as the power and consort of Viṣhṇu. Lakṣhmī is sometimes seen here as particularly associated with a special aspect of Lord Viṣhṇu, the Nārāyaṇa aspect, the Lord of the cosmos resting on the Sheṣha snake in the ocean of causal potency.

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[7] Dr. H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaiṣhṇava Sect.*

This Lakṣhmī or Shrī as the mother goddess played a very important part in some of the Vaiṣhṇavite sects of India, particularly in the Vaiṣhṇavism of the South. The Shrī sect of Vaiṣhṇavism, as the name itself will indicate, laid great stress on this mother aspect of the Viṣhṇu-shakti. Just as in our domestic life the mother stands somewhat like an intermediary between the father and the son, so does Lakṣhmī stand as an intermediary between God and the Jīvas (beings), making the former compassionate and merciful to the latter and the latter dutiful and devoted to the former.

(v) DEVĪ

Of the Vedic hymns, the hundred and twenty-fifth hymn of the tenth *maṇḍala* (Book) of the *Ṛig-Veda* has, in later times, acquired a notability as being the origin of the Mother cult of India, and as such it is well known as the Devī-sūkta, or the hymn to the mother goddess. The whole hymn is an ecstatic exclamation of Vāch, the daughter of the sage Ambhṛiṇa ; through self-illumination she realized her complete identity with the Great One (Brahman). In such a state she exclaimed, "It is I (as identical with Brahman) who move in the form of the Rudras, the Vasus, the Ādityas and all the other gods ; I support both Mitra and Varuṇa, Agni and Indra, and the two Ashwins. I support the foe-destroying Soma (Moon), Twaṣhṭṛi, Pūṣhan and Bhaga ; I bestow on the institutor of the sacrifice, ready with oblations and offering homage to the gods, deserving wealth. I am the sovereign power (over all the worlds), bestower of all wealth, cognizant (of the Supreme Being), and the first among those to whom sacrificial homage is to be offered ; the gods in all places worship but me, who am diverse in form and permeate everything. Whoever eats food, or sees, or breathes, or hears what is spoken, does it through me ; those who do not know me thus perish. Hear, O worthy one, what I tell of—which should be known through faith and reverence. I myself am telling you of this (the truth), which is respected by gods and men alike ; whom I will, I make great, I make him the Creator, I make him the seer, I make him the genius. I bend the bow of Rudra for slaying the ferocious enemy of the Brāhmaṇas ; I wage war to protect the good, I pervade heaven and earth. I give birth to the infinite expanse overspreading the earth ; my birth-place is in waters deep in the sea ;

therefrom do I permeate variously all the worlds, and touch the heaven above with my body. It is I who blow like the wind creating all the worlds; I transcend the heaven above, I transcend the earth below—this is the greatness I have attained."

The 'I' refers to the poetess of the hymn through whom the almighty glory of the Primal Being has been proclaimed, and with which she apparently identifies herself.

(VI) RĀTRĪ

Another Vedic hymn which is also associated with the Mother cult of later days is the hymn to the Night, the hundred and twenty-seventh hymn in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛig-Veda*. Here the Night has been invoked as a goddess (*devī*) who is the daughter of the heaven above, who pervades the worlds, who protects all beings from evils and gives them peaceful shelter in her lap just like the affectionate mother. This Night-goddess has been invoked also in the later *Sāma-vidhāna Brāhmaṇa* (3. 3. 8), where we find some of her traditional descriptions as the mother goddess. In later Purāṇic texts the Night is explained as coming forth from the *maya* (creative power) of Brahman, and she is called Bhuvaneshwarī (the sovereign power over the worlds). The feminine conception of *rātrī* (night) is found in the Brāhmaṇas. In Tāntrika philosophy, however, the night or the moon often symbolizes Shakti or the feminine aspect of the one non-dual truth of which the day as the sun represents the male aspect (Shiva). It has to be noted in this connection that there are various aspects of the Moon-goddess described in the Vedic literature. Sinīvālī and Kuhū stand for the first and the second part respectively of the new-moon day, while Anumati and Rākā represent those parts respectively of the full-moon day (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa,* 7. 11; *Mahābhārata,* 8. 34. 32). It has even been suggested that most of the ancient goddesses were originally moon-goddesses, but developed later into goddesses of fertility and generation. It is worthy of note also that many epithets ending with the word *rātrī* have been given to Durgā in the Chaṇḍī chapters of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.*

(VII) AMBIKĀ, UMĀ, DURGĀ

Coming to the other Vedas, which are generally taken to be later in point of time, we find the mention of the goddess Ambikā in the

Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā (*White Yajur-Veda,* 3. 57), where Ambikā is addressed as the sister of the god Rudra and is invoked to come and partake of her share in the sacrifice along with Rudra. The invocation is repeated in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1. 6. 10. 4). In the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* (1. 10. 20)[8] this Ambikā has been said to be the sister as well as the *yonī* (mother? female counterpart?) of Ṛudra. In the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (1. 6. 10. 4) and both the *Maitrāyaṇī* and the *Kāṭhaka Saṁhitā* this Ambikā as the sister of Rudra has been identified with the autumn. Commentators have also identified Ambikā with the autumn, which betrays the fact that she was originally a harvest goddess ; and when this Ambikā became identified with Durgā, the autumnal worship of the goddess became a widespread custom. We find a reference to the goddess Durgā of the colour of fire in an appendix to the *Ṛig-Veda* (Khila 10. 127) as also in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (10. 1. 2). The *Hiraṇyakeshi Gṛihya-sūtra* mentions the name of the goddess Bhavānī (later on taken to be the wife of Shiva who was called Bhava) to whom sacrificial offerings were prescribed. The *Shāṅkhāyana Gṛihya-sūtra* mentions Bhadrakālī (generally identified with Chaṇḍī and sometimes with Saraswatī) as an insignificant goddess.

In the *Atharva-Veda* we find a hymn (6. 38) addressed plainly to the great mother goddess (*devī*). Two things may be specially noted in the hymn, viz. that the great goddess is the underlying brilliance and power in everything that possesses brilliance and power, and that she is the mother even of Indra, that is, the power underlying the might even of the mightiest of the gods. We next come across this great goddess in the *Kena Upanishad,* where also the goddess, dazzling in her divine splendour, reveals herself to Indra, the foremost of the gods. The goddess explained to Indra that the great Incomprehensible One that gave victory to the gods against the Asuras (demons) was none but Brahman Itself, which was the real power behind everything and should in all cases be glorified.

Two points of great historical importance should not escape our eyes. In the first place, we see that the goddess was named Umā, one of the most famous names of the great goddess of India. Secondly, Umā is qualified by the word *haimavatī,* which has been philosophically interpreted as of the golden hue, but which may historically be interpreted as belonging to the mountain Himavat, i.e. the Himālayas. Umā seems to be a word of very obscure origin, and the proposed derivations are either arbitrary or esoteric. Thus it has been held that the vowel *u* means Shiva, and *mā* means to measure ; the goddess who measures Shiva, that is, the Shakti of Shiva, is called Umā. Kālidāsa says in his *Kumāra-sambhava* that Parvatī (the goddess as the daughter of the mountain) was dissuaded by her mother Menakā from resorting to austere penance for Shiva with the words *"u, mā"* (Oh, don't), and hence is the name Umā for Pārvatī. The *Hari-vaṁsha* gives her original name as Aparṇā. The view that Umā represents a variant of the syllable Om (the Praṇava) composed of the letters *a, u* and *m* and as such stands as the first symbol for the manifestation of the unmanifest, seems to be a later esoteric interpretation. The Babylonian Ummu or Umma, the Accadian Ummi, and Dravidian Umma can be connected with each other and with Umā—all standing for the mother goddess.[9] In the coin of Huvishka the goddess is found as 'Ommo.' The epithet Haimavatī used as an adjective most probably had some reference to her association with the Himālayas, either as her father or as her abode. In the Purāṇic Age she is found associated with other mountains or peaks, e.g. the Vindhyas. She is sometimes associated with Mount Mandāra, or Meru, or Kailāsa. The most common epithet Pārvatī (or Girijā) attached to the great mother goddess of India lends support to the belief that she was originally a mountain goddess like the ancient mother goddesses of other countries. Pārvatī is also associated with the lion as her vehicle (*vāhana*), as some of the ancient mother goddesses of other countries were.

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[8] Haṁsarāja's Vedic Kosha, quoted in *The Mother Goddess,* p. 60 f. by S. K. Dikshit

Though no other direct mention of the goddess Umā is found in the Āraṇyakas or the Upaniṣhads, commentators have professed to discover Umā in a few passages of the Āraṇyakas. Thus the great commentator Sāyaṇāchārya explained the word *soma* of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* as the Lord accompanied by Umā (*umayā saha vartamānaḥ*), where Umā stands for the Knowledge of Brahman. Mahīdhara in his commentary on the *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā* and Bhaṭṭa-bhāskara Mishra in his commentary on the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* also explain the word *soma* as shown above.[10] The word

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[9] S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess.*

[10] Bengali *Vishwa-kosha.*

Ambikā-pataye (to the lord of Ambikā) is found in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka,* which has its variant as *Umāpataye* (the lord of Umā) in the Southern recension. The *Yājñikī Upanishad,* attached to the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka,* contains the famous *Gāyatrī* of the goddess Durgā,[11] viz. "We know the goddess Kātyāyanī (another name of Durgā, of which we shall speak later on), we meditate on the goddess Kanyā-kumārī (another name for Durgā): may that goddess Durgā direct us!". This text and similar other texts like the *Ṛik-parishishṭa* (appendix to the *Ṛig-Veda*), *Bahvṛicha Upanishad, Nārāyaṇa Upanishad, Devī Upanishad,* etc. do not seem to have any claim to be recognized as older texts than the Purāṇas.

It is difficult to say with any degree of certainty if any ceremonial and ritualistic worship of the mother goddess in any of her popular forms as Durgā, Chaṇḍī or Kālī was current in India during the Epic Age, we mean roughly the ages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata.* In the first canto of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* however, we find mention of the goddess Umā, who is described as the daughter of the mountain Himālaya by his wife Menā (Menakā) and as the sister of the river Gaṅgā. This Umā is said to have been given in marriage to Mahādeva (Shiva) and is called in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the great goddess as the consort of Mahādeva. The story has been repeated also in the *Mahābhārata.* We may further notice the mention of the goddess Lakshmī or Shrī several times in the *Rāmāyaṇa* generally as the Shakti of Vishṇu. In the Sauptika-parvan of the *Mahābhārata* we find a description of the dreadful goddess Kālī with black complexion, red eyes and face and body besmeared with blood and a noose as weapon. She is the Night of destruction (Kāla-rātrī, and hence perhaps the association of the great mother goddess with the hymn to the Night of the *Ṛig-Veda*)—the goddess of destruction. In this connection we may refer to the Vedic goddess Nirṛiti, who is also described in the Brāhmaṇa literature as a black and terrible goddess—the goddess of misfortunes—who is the generatrix and is fond of the cremation ground.

In the *Mahābhārata* there is also the mention of the worship of

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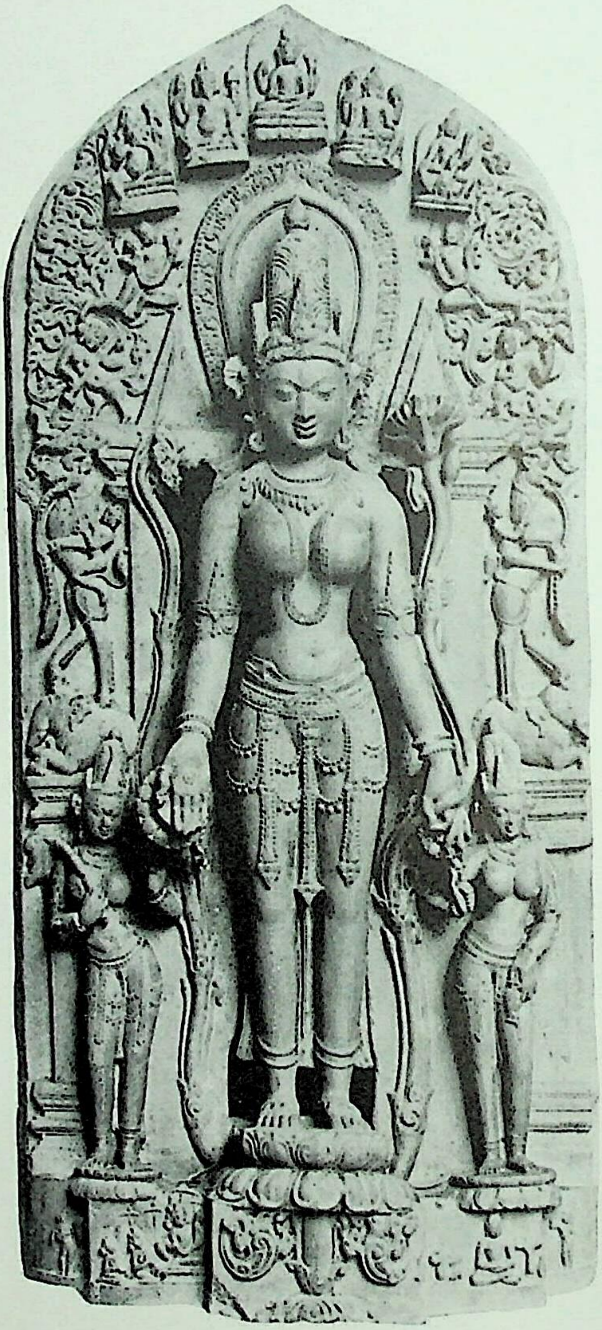
[11] Corresponding to the Vedic pattern of the *Gāyatrī mantra,* most of the gods and goddesses of later times were credited with a *Gāyatrī mantra.* These generally possess three parts: in the first part it is said, "We know the god or goddess" (*vidmahe*); in the second part, "We meditate on him or her" (*dhīmahi*), and the third part says, "May he or she direct us!" (*prachodayāt*).



PĀRVATĪ

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the mother goddess as Kātyāyanī (and a somewhat detailed description of her) by Pradyumna and also a hymn to the goddess Chaṇḍī by Aniruddha. The most important, however, is the hymn to the goddess Durgā by King Yudhiṣhṭhira. The hymn contains some descriptions of the goddess with which we are familiar in the Purāṇic Age. In some recensions of the text we find another hymn to Durgā chanted by Arjuna at the instance of Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa. Scholars have doubted the authenticity of some at least, if not all, of these references in the *Mahābhārata.*

This Umā or Pārvatī, the Indian mountain goddess, seems to be the basis of the Purāṇic *magna mater,* with whom most of the other mother goddesses, mostly indigenous in origin, were associated, or in whom, we may say, most of them have merged themselves. The evolution of the idea and philosophy of Shakti greatly helped this process of identification and unification. As the Shakti is fundamentally one, the mother must also be one ; the mothers were necessarily intermingled and unified. Umā or Pārvatī as the consort or the inseparable counterpart of Lord Shiva seems to have attained wide prominence by the beginning of the Christian era. Umā-Maheshwara or Hara-Pārvatī drew almost universal respect in India as the primordial Father and Mother. Kālidāsa began his great epic *Raghu-vaṁsha* with a salute to Pārvatī-Parameshwara, the Mother and Father of the universe, who are said to be eternally and inseparably related to each other just as a word and its meaning are. In the *Kumāra-sambhava* he narrates how Umā obtained Mahādeva as her husband through austere penances. In this work of Kālidāsa we come across another very popular name of Umā, viz. Gaurī (yellowish white) Aparṇā (during her penance for Lord Shiva, not taking as her food even the leaves—*parṇa*—that fell from the trees). In this text we find mention also of the divine mothers,[12] who attended the marriage procession of Shiva ; and the direful goddess Kālī of the colour of deep dark clouds with her garland of human skulls followed these divine mothers. This description of Kālikā is repeated in the *Raghu-vaṁsha*.

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[12] The divine mothers (Mātaraḥ or the Mātṛikās) are generally seven in number, viz. Brāhmī or Brahmāṇī, Māheshwarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣhṇavī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī or Aindrī or Māhendrī and Chāmuṇḍā. Sometimes the number is given as eight and sometimes even as sixteen. We find mention of these Mātṛikās in the Mahābhārata, where we find them in charge of attending on Skanda, son of Mahādeva. Being closely associated with Shiva, these divine mothers came into prominence in the Purāṇas and the Tantras, and in places represented the great Mother herself or were treated as her aspects. In Tāntrika *sādhanā,* however, the Mātṛikas attained a deep significance, to which we shall come later on.

In the *Kumāra-sambhava* we find reference to Dakṣha's daughter Satī attending a Vedic sacrifice arranged by her father, to which her husband Shiva was not invited, and committing suicide because of the insult offered to him by her father, with the determination of becoming the wife of Shiva in her next birth ; accordingly, in her next birth as Umā, she obtained Shiva once more as her husband by dint of austere penance.

As for the other literary records which contain reference to the worship of the mother goddess in some of her many forms, mention may be made of the prose works *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu (sixth or beginning of seventh century) and *Kādambarī* and *Harṣha-charita* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa (seventh century?), *Gauḍavaha* (a Prakrit work by Vākpatirāja of the eighth century) and *Mālatī-Mādhava*, a famous drama by Bhavabhūti, probably of the eighth century. The mother goddesses that are described in these texts seem to be indigenous in origin and to have their worshippers mainly among the lower strata of the then Indian society, and they were to be propitiated with animal sacrifices—with wine, meat and blood. The *Gauḍavaha*, mentioned above, records the worship by the non-Aryan Shabaras of Parṇa-shabarī—a goddess residing in the Vindhya mountain, who was so named because of the fact that she wore only leaves (*parṇa*). In the *Kādambarī* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa we find the worship of the goddess by the Shabaras. *Khila-Hari-vaṁsha* (an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*) says that the goddess Durgā was worshipped by savages like the Shabaras, Barbaras and Pulindas, and that she was very fond of meat and wine. What seems to be beyond doubt is that roughly between the beginning of the Christian era and the tenth century A.D., many local and indigenous goddesses pushed themselves from the social sub-strata to find a place in the Hindu pantheon, and by a process of generalization, both religious and philosophical, were fused together and treated as aspects of the one universal mother goddess. It is not, therefore, a fact, as is sometimes wrongly conceived, that the many mother goddesses are later emanations from the one mother goddess ; on the contrary, the one mother goddess of the Purāṇic Age seems to be a consolidation of the many mother goddesses—a consolidation brought about by the philosophy of Shakti.

3. The Principle of Shakti

It is therefore proper that before dealing in detail with the mother goddess of the Purāṇic period we should say a few words as to the origin and development of the idea of Shakti in India.

In the Indian idea of Shakti we find a happy blending of two elements, one empirical and the other speculative. On the empirical side the idea of Shakti is associated with the idea of cosmogony. It has been the uncontradicted experience of man from the dawn of his understanding that there cannot be any origination whatsoever unless there is the union of the two—the male and the female. Human analogy was naturally extended to the origination of the universe as a whole, and thus man came to the idea of the primordial Father and the primordial Mother. As we have seen, in the primitive condition of society the mother held the most important position, and thus the cosmic mother became the most important deity. In India, from the age of the Indus Civilization of Mohenjo-daro and Harappā down to the present time, the father God is represented by the *liṅga* (the male symbol) and the mother Goddess by the *yoni* (the female symbol). This representation of Shiva-Shakti by the *liṅga-yoni* is a popular religious practice in India, and in most of the ancient and modern temples of Shiva the twin are worshipped in their symbolic representations. In the Tantra literature (both Hindu and Buddhist) the Lord (Bhagavān, the male deity) is symbolically represented by a white dot (*shweta-bindu*), thus suggesting the likeness with semen, while the Creatrix (Bhagavatī, the female deity) is represented by a red dot (*shoṇa-bindu*), to suggest the analogy with the menstrual blood containing the ovum.

(I) IN PHILOSOPHY

From the speculative side it was observed that everything that existed, existed by virtue of its power or powers. So God, who exists as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, must possess infinite power through which He creates, preserves and destroys the universe. In fact, His very being presupposes infinite power by virtue of which He Himself exists. This belief in the power of God is a universal belief; but what lends it a specially Indian colour is the dominant tendency of the Indians to view this power or universal energy as something like a female counterpart of the possessor of this power. This power or *shakti,* being conceived as a counterpart of the possessor of *shakti,* came to be recognized frankly as the consort of the possessor. This is responsible for the fact that not only among the Shāktas (believers in Shakti in whatever form as the supreme deity) but in almost all other religious sects—the Shaivas (believers in Shiva as the supreme deity), the Sauras (believers in the Sun-god as the supreme deity), the Gāṇapatyas (believers in Gaṇapati or Gaṇesha as the supreme deity) and the Vaiṣhṇavas (believers in Viṣhṇu or any of his incarnations as the supreme deity)—an important place is occupied by Shakti. There is seldom a god or a semi-god or a demi-god of India of the Purāṇic Age for whom a consort has not been conceived as the inseparable Shakti. The same has been the case with all the gods, semi-gods and demi-gods of later phase of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[13]

A strong belief in this Shakti has brought about a popular synthesis among contrary philosophies like Sāṁkhya, Vedānta, Vaiṣhṇavism and Tāntrikism. Sāṁkhya speaks of Puruṣha and Prakṛiti as two independent and ultimate reals whose interaction is, in fact, a mere attribution resulting from the accidental contact of the two. In the Purāṇas and similar other popular religious literature, Prakṛiti is plainly conceived as the female counterpart of Puruṣha, and as such the two reals have been practically identified with Shakti and Shiva of the Tantras. Just in a similar manner the principle of *maya* (illusion) of Vedānta has been conceived as the Shakti of Brahman. These pairs have again been identified with Viṣhṇu and his Shakti, Lakṣhmī or Shrī, with Rāma and Sītā, and still later with Kṛiṣhṇa and Rādhā. Thus in the popular religious belief of India, Shiva-Shakti of the Tantras, Puruṣha-Prakṛiti of Sāṁkhya, Brahman-Māyā of Vedānta, and Viṣhṇu-Lakṣhmī, Rāma-Sītā and Kṛiṣhṇa-Rādhā of Vaiṣhṇavism all mean the same.

The philosophy of Shakti is clearly suggested by two passages in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* (1. 4. 1, 3), where it is said that in the beginning was the Cosmic Being as the Ātman (Soul) in human form, who could never feel happy (i.e. enjoy himself through any process of self-realization), for he was all alone. So he desired a second to him. His being was something like a neutral point where the ultimate principles of the male and the female lay unified in a deep embrace, as it were. This unified being divided himself into two—as the male and the female, which formed the first pair, and all the pairs of the universe are said to be replicas of this original pair. These passages of the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* have been extensively made use of in the Purāṇas, in the Tantras as also in the later Buddhist and Vaishṇava Sahajiyā schools, in which the idea of Shakti played an important part. Whatever has been created in this phenomenal process has been created from the union of the two—energy and matter, the consumer and the consumed. They represent the two aspects of the one non-dual truth—one internal and the other external—one illuminating, unchangeable and immortal (*amṛita*), and the other obstructive, gross and perishable ; the one the cause-potency and the other the effect-potency. In the Shaiva and Shākta Tantras, *prāṇa-rayi* of the *Prashna Upanishad* (1. 4) or *agni-soma* stand for Shiva-Shakti—the primordial male and female.

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[13] In this connection the following books may be consulted: (i) *Indian Buddhist Iconography* by B. Bhattacharyya, (ii) *Gods of Northern Buddhism* by A. Getty, (iii) *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by the present author.

Distinct mention of the various powers of God is found in the *Shwetāshwatara Upanishad,* in which it is said in one place, "Various powers are heard of this (Brahman). It possesses power as knowledge and power as force or activity by virtue of its very nature" (6. 8). Again, "Know *maya* (the unspeakable mysterious power of God) as Prakṛiti (Nature) and the possessor of *maya* as the Great Lord (Maheshwara, an epithet, specially used in later times, of Shiva)" (4. 10). Again it is said, "He who is one and colourless brings forth various colours through the agency of his various types of powers" (4. 1). The possessor of *maya* (*māyin*) created the universe, and the beings are fettered by his *maya.*

(II) IN VAISHṆAVISM AND SHAIVISM

The elaboration of this *Shakti-vāda* is to be found in most of the Purāṇas, Upapurāṇas, Saṁhitās and mainly in the Tantras, both Hindu and Buddhist. There is no systematic discussion on the philosophy of Shakti in the Purāṇas, even in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa,* which contains the *Chaṇḍī,* the most important text with the mother worshippers of India; discussions on Shakti in the Purāṇas are sporadic and scrappy. The main discussions are to be found in the Tantra literature, both Hindu and Buddhist, which, in our opinion, is fundamentally the same. So far as the Hindu Tantras are concerned, they seem to have flourished exclusively in the two extreme borders of India, in Kāshmīr in the north-western border and in Bengal, the easternmost province. So far as the Tāntrika literature of Bengal is concerned, scholars are disposed to think that none of these texts was composed earlier than the tenth century A.D. The tradition of the Tantras composed in Kāshmīr, however, seems to be earlier. The well known Trika school of Kāshmīr Shaivism seems to have derived many of its ideas from the older Tantras of Kāshmīr, some of which have been quoted and referred to in important texts of Shaivism. The Kāshmīr school of Shaivism most probably flourished during the period between the ninth and the tenth century A.D. Some of the Tāntrika texts must have been composed earlier. But it has to be noted that some of the Saṁhitā texts belonging to the Pañcharātra school of Vaishṇavism (sometimes referred to in the Trika school of Kāshmīr Shaivism) were composed earlier than the Shaivite texts, and the *Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā,* belonging to the Pañcharātra school, contains a good exposition of the philosophy of Shakti, though of course of Shakti as associated with Vishṇu, and not Shiva. It has been said in this text that the Ultimate Being has got two aspects, one of which is the inactive or negative state, where all His creative impulses lie dormant in Him, and the whole universe lies infinitely contracted in Him as a mere potency and possibility. This negative state may be said to be a state of nothingness, inasmuch as there is no self-realization through self-activity. Even in this state there is Shakti, but she remains perfectly absorbed in the Lord, as if in a union of deep embrace. With the urge of the first creative impulse there comes within the Lord a determination (*saṁkalpa*), which results in His will; this will of the Lord may be recognized as the first vibration of the Shakti of the Lord—the first cosmic rhythm in the absolutely calm and quiet ocean. The relation of this Shakti with the Lord is just like the inseparable relation of the sun or the moon with its rays, of the fire with its heat and sparks, of the sea with its ripples. When Shakti first awakes from her absorption in deep embrace into the first vibration of activity, she acquires something like an independence and tends to manifest herself in her triple functions, viz. willing (*ichchhā*), knowing (*jñāna*) and activity (*kriyā*). These triple ways in which the Shakti functions are at the basis of the triangular diagraṁ, the *yantra* of the mother goddess. Sometimes it has been held that Shakti is nothing but a figurative representation of the Lord ; for the power can never be viewed as separate from the agent that possesses the power. The rise or awaking of Shakti, therefore, really means the awaking of the Lord from His infinitely contracted state to the state of full-fledged I-ness (*pūrṇa-ahaṁtā*) ; Shakti is thus the full 'I-ness' of God. She is of the nature of infinite bliss, the bliss that follows from the self-realization of God through self-activity. In the state of absolute oneness the Lord realizes this bliss of Shakti as one realizes bliss by deeply embracing his wife and forgetting everything else. This Shakti can again be viewed in two of her aspects, viz. the internal aspect in which she co-exists with the Lord and in the Lord (*samavāyinī* Shakti), and the external aspect in which she, as Nature (Prakṛiti), and as the repository of the three natural qualities (i.e. the three *guṇas,* viz. *sattwa* or the intelligence stuff, *rajas,* energy stuff, and *tamas,* inertia), manifests herself as the external universe.

According to the Tāntrika texts of Kāshmīr also Shakti inheres in the Ultimate Being as a latent potency of infinite possibilities—as a seed, as it were, of the future worlds—mobile and immobile. As the Ultimate Being is real and eternal, so is Shakti who is co-existent with Him. The awaking of Shakti is something like a self-projection of the I-ness of God which is accompanied by an internal process of self-creation for the sake of sporting ; the only aim of Shakti is to satisfy the Lord by all means—and for this reason the Lord frequently disturbs her equilibrium intentionally. This Shakti has sometimes been described as the clear looking-glass through which the Lord sees and enjoys Himself ; Shiva is the abstract thinking principle which finds itself reflected in the concrete wall (*kuḍya*) of Shakti. She is called Kāmeshwarī since she fulfils all the desires (*kāma*) of the Lord.

(III) AS RELATED TO SHIVA AND SHAKTI

We need not enter into any more detailed study of the philosophy of Shakti as is found in other Tāntrika literature of different types and of different times; but three different views on the relation between Shiva and Shakti, propounded in the Purāṇas and the Tantras, must be clearly brought out. The first view holds that neither Shiva nor Shakti represents the absolute truth; the Absolute Reality is a state of neutrality where Shiva and Shakti remain in a state of perfect union (*yāmala*); this is called the *sāmarasya,* where all things become one in a unity of blissful realization. Shiva and Shakti are two aspects of the same truth—the static and the dynamic, the negative and the positive, the abstract and the concrete, the male and the female. In the Buddhist Tantras the *Adwaya Bodhichitta,* the non-dual perfectly illumined consciousness, is the highest truth from which flow the two currents of *shūnyatā* (perfect knowledge of the essencelessness of things) and *karuṇā* (universal compassion), or *prajñā* (perfect enlightenment) and *upāya* (expedience). *Prajñā* is static, the negative aspect of the truth, while *upāya* is dynamic, the positive aspect; the *prajñā* and *upāya* of the Buddhist Tantras stand for the same truth as the Shakti and Shiva of the Hindu Tantras, with this peculiarity that, unlike the Hindu Tantras, the Buddhist Tantras call the static or negative aspect of the truth the female, and the dynamic or positive aspect the male.[14]

The second view, however, holds that Shiva is the Ultimate Being to whom Shakti eternally belongs. Nevertheless, neither Shiva nor Shakti is real without the other; as Shakti cannot be conceived of without the possessor of Shakti, so also Shiva becomes *shava* (dead) without Shakti. The two are therefore eternally and inseparably connected. The third view makes Shakti the highest truth, and Shiva is conceived of as the best support of Shakti. Shakti is the more important as the contained, while Shiva is the container. Shakti is the all-creating, all-preserving and all-destroying power of which Shiva is the best container (*ādhāra*). In some of the Purāṇas the male deity as the *shaktimat* (the possessor of Shakti) has been described as the male aspect of the ultimate truth which is Shakti. It is from this point of view that the Mother worshippers would give a subsidiary place to Shiva, whereas Shakti as the Mother is taken to be the highest object of adoration. In this her sovereign majesty, the goddess is sometimes called the Lalitā Devī[15] from whom the male deity proceeds as a transformation of her own self. She is also called Tripurasundarī in the Tantras.

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[14] For details, see *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by the present writer.

(IV) IN SHRĪ AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY

The great goddess, taken generally as the power of the Supreme, or, according to Shrī Aurobindo, the great Mother worshipper of the twentieth century, the conscious force of the Supreme, has different aspects of her emanations and manifestations. The first is the "Transcendent, the original supreme Shakti ; she stands above the worlds and links the creation to the ever unmanifest mystery of the Supreme."[16] "Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence ; containing or calling the Truths that have to be manifested, she brings them down from the Mystery in which they were hidden into the light of her infinite consciousness and gives them a form of force in her omnipotent power and her boundless life and a body in the universe."[17] The second is the "Universal, the cosmic Mahāshakti ; she creates all these beings and contains and enters, supports and conducts all these million processes and forces."[18] The third is the individual Shakti, who "embodies the power of these two vaster ways of her existence, makes them living and near to us and mediates between the human personality and the divine Nature."[19]

Again, it has been said in the Purāṇas and the Tantras that the great goddess or the Original Nature (*mūla-prakṛiti*) works in the creative realm in three of her personalities, each of which emanates from her ; with the preponderance of *sattwa* emanates the goddess Mahāsaraswatī, with *rajas* the goddess Mahālakṣhmī and with *tamas* the goddess Mahākālī. Shrī Aurobindo interprets the four great aspects of the Mother in the following way: "Four great

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[15] Apart from this philosophical conception of the goddess as Lalitā, Lalitā often stands as the general mother goddess of India. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* gives us a detailed account of the great goddess as Lalitā, but space prevents us from going into details.

[16] Shrī Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 37.

[17] *Ibid.* p. 38.

[18] *Ibid.* p. 37.

[19] *Ibid.*

Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. . . . To the four we give the four great names, Maheshwarī, Mahākālī, Mahālakṣhmī, Mahāsaraswatī."[20]

(v) IN THE PURĀṆAS: CHAṆḌĪ SAPTASHATĪ

Shakti as the great mother and the highest truth has found an elaborate exposition in the Devī-māhātmya (glory of the goddess) section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, and this portion of the Purāṇa, consisting of thirteen chapters (from the eighty-first to the ninety-third) is regarded as the most sacred text of the Mother worshippers of India and is well known as the *Chaṇḍī*.

In the story the goddess has been mainly styled as the Devī, i.e. the great goddess ; but the Devī became well known in later times as Durgā. The name Durgā has variously been interpreted in the Purāṇic and Tāntrika literature, the import of which is that she is the mother goddess who saves us all from all sorts of misery and affliction—from all sorts of dangers and difficulties. She is also called Chaṇḍī—the fierce goddess, as she incarnates herself whenever occasion demands for the purpose of destroying the Asuras (demons) who may threaten the mental peace and the heavenly domain of the divine beings. This Durgā is the great mother goddess whose worship during the autumnal season is the most celebrated religious function of the Bengalee Hindus. She is worshipped, as we have already pointed out, also as Annapūrṇā or

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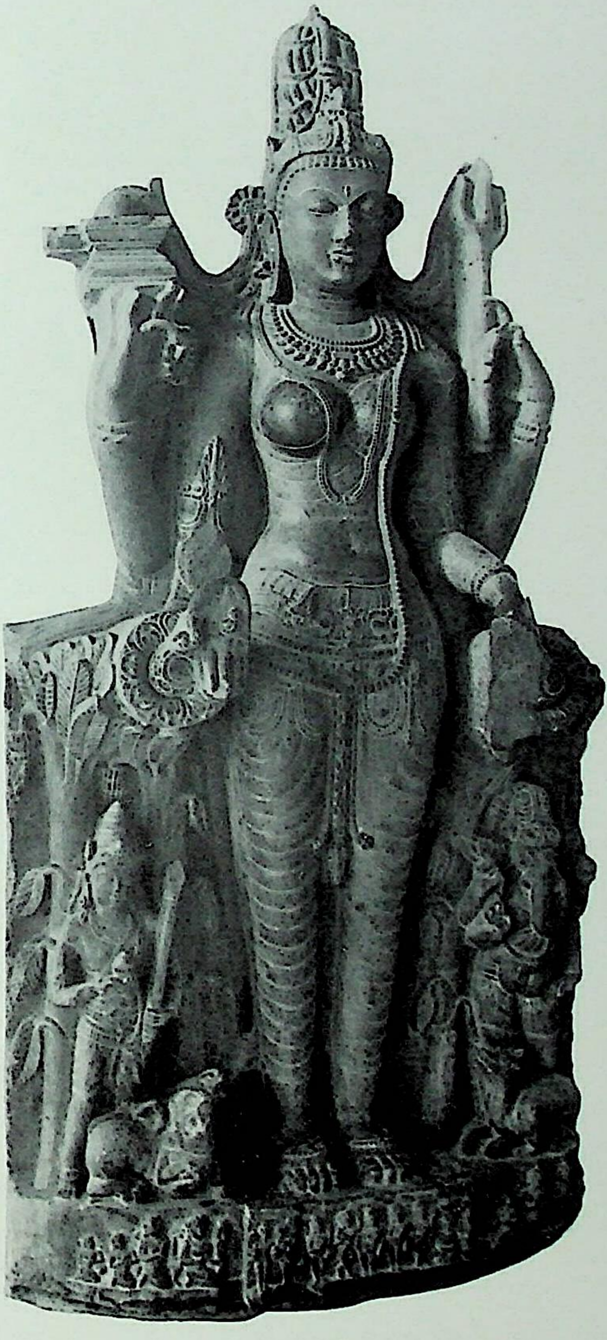
[20] *Ibid.* pp. 48-50.



CHAṆḌĪ

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Annadā—the goddess of corn and food.[21] Near about the autumn she is also worshipped as Jagaddhātrī, i.e. the maintainer or fosterer of the world. During the spring she is worshipped as Vāsantī, i.e. the spring goddess. This Durgā or rather the Devī of the Purāṇic period has assimilated within her all the then prevalent mother goddesses of India, most of whom, as we have indicated before, were indigenous local goddesses. In some of the Purāṇas the Devī is said to be worshipped in one hundred and eight names in one hundred and eight sacred places all over India.[22] In some texts there is an attempt at enumerating the thousand names of the goddess. Even a cursory glance at these lists will convince one that some of these names represent the different attributes of the goddess, while others point to the fact that they are local goddesses later on generalized and merged in one great mother goddess.

In the Devī-kavacha[23] attached to the *Chaṇḍī*,[24] the Devī as Navadurgā is described as Shailaputrī (the daughter of the mountain), Brahmachariṇī, Chandraghaṇṭā, Kuṣhmāṇḍā, Skandamātā (the mother of Skanda), Kātyāyanī, Kālarātrī, Mahāgaurī and Siddhidatrī. The mothers are Chāmuṇḍā seated on the corpse, Vārāhī on the buffalo, Aindrī on the elephant, Vaiṣhṇavī on Garuḍa (the bird), Nārasiṁhī, Shivadūtī, Māheshwarī seated on the bull, Kaumārī on the peacock, Lakṣhmī on the lotus, Ishwarī, the white goddess, on the bull and Brāhmī on the swan. There are a host of other names of different descriptions. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar has rightly remarked in this connection, "In the account here given, it will be seen that there is one goddess with a number of different names. But the critical eye will see that they are not merely names, but indicate different goddesses who owed their conception to different historical conditions, but who were afterwards identified with the one goddess by the usual mental habit of the Hindus."[25] Many of the goddesses are but different Shaktis, associated with the different godheads of India, including Varāha (the boar-god) and Narasiṁha (the man-lion god). Some of them are probably added from the stock of the aboriginal non-Aryans. Thus, for instance, the goddess Chāmuṇḍā is perhaps a non-Aryan blood-thirsty goddess, as early references to her would show. Bhandarkar thinks that Kātyāyanī is the tutelary goddess of the Kātyas, as Kaushikī is the goddess of the Kaushikas. To the names Shākambharī, Bhrāmarī, etc. we have referred before.

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[21] The similarity of this goddess Annapūrṇā with the ancient Italian goddess Anna Perenna, at least in name, is noteworthy.

[22] Thus in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (Ch. 13) it is said that though she is all-pervading and underlies all the forms, the devotees desirous of attaining perfection should worship her in different places in different forms and names as enumerated. A similar list is found in the *Padma* and some other Purāṇas also.

[23] The word *kavacha* means an armour; as used to denote a hymn to a goddess, it is believed to shield the reciter from miseries, dangers and difficulties.

[24] Some ascribe it to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, some to the *Varāha Purāṇa* and some to the Tāntrika text *Rudra-Yāmala*.

The question of the adoption and assimilation of some of the Buddhist goddesses has also been suggested in this connection. For instance, Tārā, a popular goddess with the Hindus, is a famous Buddhist goddess. Chhinnamastā may be said to be a Hindu version of the Buddhist goddess Vajrayoginī. Parṇa-shabarī is also a well known Buddhist goddess. But the epithet 'Buddhist goddess' has to be used and understood with a little caution. Most of the goddesses, whether Hindu or Buddhist or Jain, are but Indian goddesses, mostly of indigenous origin, accepted and associated at different times and localities with different religious systems or beliefs. The only question in this connection, however, is whether a particular goddess was first recognized in this or that religion, and whether she found her place in one religion of India *via* another.

It will not be out of place here to mention the tradition of the fifty-one *pīṭhas* (sacred places). When the great Mother in her incarnation as Satī, daughter of Dakṣha, threw away her body in yoga as a protest against her father's insulting her husband, Mahādeva (the great god) took the dead body of his beloved consort on his shoulder and began to roam about in the three worlds, mad in grief. This disturbed the universe, creating chaos, to prevent which Viṣhṇu came forward with his weapon of discus and from behind the great god cut the body of the mother goddess Satī into fifty-one pieces, which fell in fifty-one places of India, thus making them great centres of Mother worship. This legend also seems to be another attempt at assimilating all the mother goddesses of India into one—the great goddess. There is the other legend of the mother goddess Satī transforming herself into ten goddesses with a view to frightening the great god (Mahādeva) to obtain permission from him for going to attend the sacrifice arranged by her father Dakṣha. These ten goddesses are known as the ten Mahāvidyās (ten great aspects of the supreme knowledge).[26] Scholars are disposed to think that these ten Mahāvidyās are ten different indigenous goddesses who have been later on associated with and assimilated to the great mother goddess with the help of both legend and theology. The *sādhakas* (spiritual aspirants), on the other hand, would take them as different aspects of the same great Mother, Shakti, suited to the taste, temperament and mental level of the *sādhaka.*

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[25] Bhandarkar, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 205.

So far as the ceremonial and ritualistic worship of the great mother goddess Durgā is concerned, Bengal leads the other provinces of India. In the annual worship of the Mother in her earthen image especially constructed on the occasion, the Mother is generally represented as Mahiṣha-mardinī, or as trampling under her feet and killing Mahiṣhāsura (the buffalo-demon) as narrated in the *Chaṇḍī.* She has the lion as her *vāhana* (carrier) and is accompanied by Jayā and Vijayā (said to be identical with the goddesses Lakṣhmī and Saraswatī) as her daughters and Gaṇesha (the god who grants all success) and Kārttika (the commander-in-chief of the gods) as her sons ranged on her two sides. Kālī is the other popular mother goddess of Bengal, who is worshipped daily in many old temples, and whose annual worship falls in the dark night of the new moon (*amāvasyā*) about three weeks after the autumnal worship of Mother Durgā.

We need not enter into the ritualistic details of the various kinds of worship prescribed in a host of Purāṇic and Tāntrika texts composed at different times. Besides the *bīja-mantras* (monosyllabic words believed to be the sound representations of the different gods and goddesses) there are a great many other *mantras,* believed to be pregnant with some mystic potency, which to our modern mind may indeed sound as unmeaning jargon. There are various other elements —postures and gestures, songs and dances, pageantry and revelry— that accompany the Mother worship. There is again the belief in some goddesses associated with particular dreadful diseases; this belief seems to be common to humanity as a whole, irrespective of geographical and racial differences. In India we have the belief in the goddess of serpents, Manasā, or Vishaharī, who is again associated with septic ulcers of a pernicious type ; there is the goddess of small-pox (called Shītalā in some localities), of cholera (the goddess Kālī is in some localities associated with it), of child diseases (the goddess Ṣhaṣhṭhī, who is the patroness of children, is sometimes associated with these), and so on.

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[26] These are kālī, Tārā, Ṣhoḍashī, Bhuvaneshwarī, Bhairavī, Chhinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Vagalā, Mātaṅgī and Kamalā.

Mother worship in India, and particularly in Bengal, has to be viewed in the aspect in which it has deepened the religious consciousness of the people and thus moulded their sense of higher values. It is through this process that it can add a colour and quality to the very culture of the people. The mother goddess could stir the life and intellect of the people of the country mainly through the philosophy of Shakti, to which we have briefly referred before, and a nice exposition of which is found in the *Chaṇḍī* itself.

The story of the *Chaṇḍī* first introduces the great Mother as the principle of great illusion (*mahāmāyā*) which prevents us from viewing things of life and the world around from the real perspective ; it creates in our defiled mind a fierce attachment to the objects of the world and thus binds us down to a lower plane of existence, the plane of miseries and afflictions. But whence is this principle of objective illusion? It is an aspect of the same divine Power which is responsible for the whole creative process, and which is shaping the universe eternally to its end. It was there as one with the Supreme Being even when the cosmos was not, and it remains there absorbed in the very existence of the Supreme Being even after the dissolution of the universe—as a potency, as a seed of future creative manifestation. It has its sway not only on all animates and inanimates but also on the Supreme Being, and in connection with the latter it is called *yogamāyā,* the *maya* directly in touch with the Lord. This *mahāmāyā* as the *mahāshakti* (great Power) remains absolutely inactive at the time of dissolution, and this inactivity of the Shakti lulls the Supreme Being to profound sleep, as it were, in the ocean of causal potency. She is the Mahākālī, since she contracts eternal time (*kāla*) within her and from her time proceeds again as an endless flow of creative vibration. It will not be right to consider this Power as a mere spiritual entity ; she is the Power—spiritual, moral and mental, the Power—biological and physiological as well as grossly physical. Whatever there is, is due to her ; whatever works, works because of her.

As on the one hand all our spiritual aspirations and activities for the realization of the highest bliss proceed from her, so also do all the states and processes of our mind, including all higher intellection, emotion and conation as well as our animal instincts and urges. She manifests herself again in and through all the bio-motor activities which we call the life-process, and through the laws of Nature. It is because of this that in the hymns to the great goddess by the gods we find that she is the *mantra* for offering oblations to the gods and the fathers ; she is the *praṇava* (Om) and its three component parts (a, u, and m); she is the *gāyatrī* and the subtle *mantras* that escape vocal articulation ; she is the almighty Power solely responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. As she is the supreme knowledge (*mahāvidyā*) and great mental vigour as understanding (*mahāmedhā*), so also is she great forgetfulness and great attachment. She is the great power of the gods and the demons. She is grace in everything that is graceful ; she is the real power in everything that is powerful ; she is the sense of shame as also shyness ; she is the vigour in our intellect ; she is the giver of our nourishment ; she is contentment, peace of mind and forbearance. She is fierceness in war and contest, and again she is in the tenderest of our sentiments. She is prosperity in the house of the honest, and ruin in the house of the evil-minded ; she is in all our wisdom and merit ; she is in all our ignorance and vice ; she is in Brahmā, the first created and the greatest, and she is equally in the smallest of insects ; she is in our highest state of liberation and bliss ; she is in the worst state of bondage and suffering ; she shines in the best of smiles, and she darkens everything by the most terrific frowns.

What, then, is the significance of Mother worship to a real *sādhaka*? To feel that he and his universe are nothing but media for the manifestation of one all-pervading Power—the Power of God, the Power that is one with God. Not merely to understand intellectually, but to realize in each and every one of his cells that he lives and moves and has his being in the divine Power that is both immanent and transcendent. All spiritual endeavours of a true devotee of Shakti aim at the realization that his self, including his body, mind and spirit, is an instrument through which the great Mother produces the song of life—a song infinitely varied in tunes and melodies. There is thus a feeling of all-pervading oneness—a *sāmarasya* in the widest and the truest sense of the term—where there no longer remains any within or without. In the *Chaṇḍī*, therefore, the worshippers in their hours of exaltation invoke the Mother all around them as also above and below them—the Mother who is perfect within and perfect without.

The *Chaṇḍī* is full of battles between the Mother on one side and the prominent *Asuras* (demons) with their hosts on the other. To an aspirant the whole thing is but an allegorical representation of the continual war that is going on within between the divine and the demoniac in man. Every dominant passion or instinct has its special array—a truth symbolized by the chief demons and their respective armies. Our passions and instincts, as has been convincingly demonstrated by modern psycho-analysis, whenever they are in danger of being eradicated or suppressed, change their form and colour and try to escape in disguise. This has been illustrated by the story of some of the demons changing their shape when challenged by Shakti, the divine Power. The other fact is that so deep-rooted the passions and the instincts are in us that they often seem to be indestructible, since one that is killed is replaced at once by another, and so on. This is well illustrated by the goddess's fight with the demon Raktabīja, from whose every drop of blood shed on the ground sprouted a demon with fresh vigour and ferocity. It is the awakening of the Mother within, that is, full consciousness of the divine Power working in and through him, that makes man strong and surcharged with the immense power of God.

(VI) IN THE TANTRAS

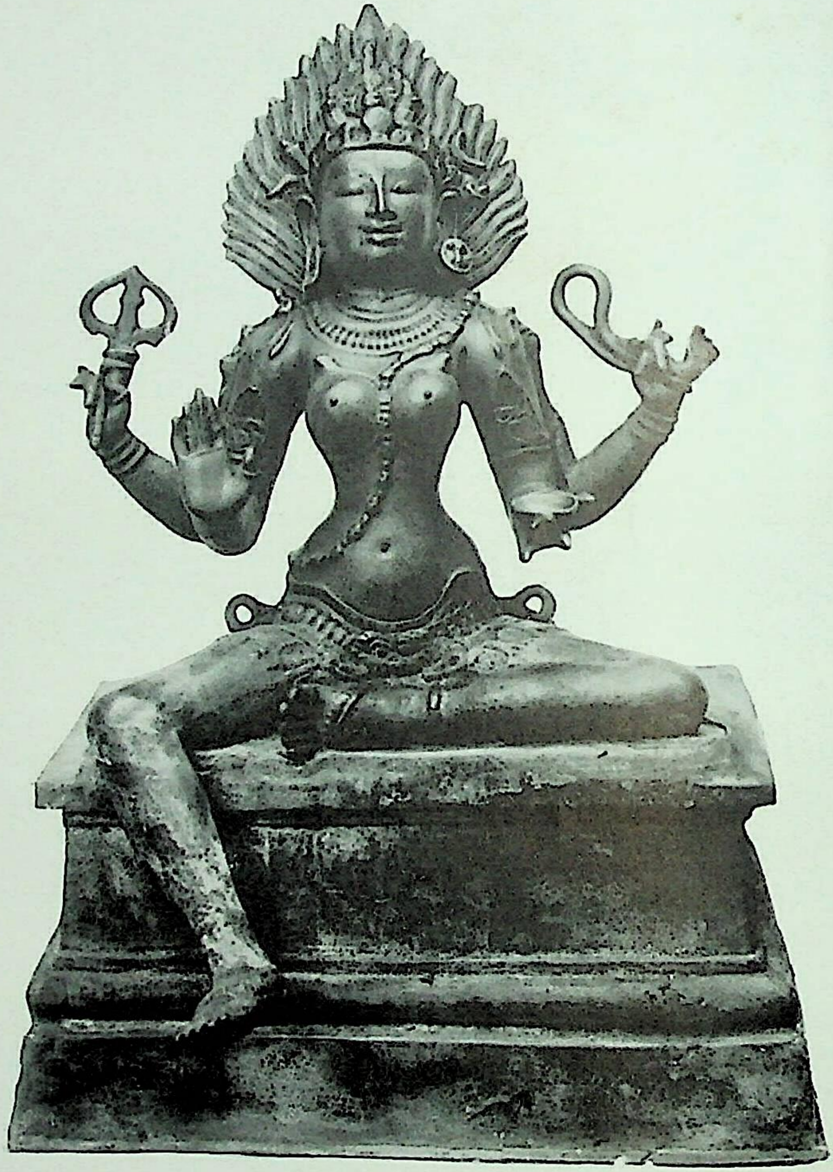
The significance of the Mother worship, therefore, lies in the *sādhanā*—the practical endeavour for the realization of the truth. Because of the sole importance of this, Mother worship in India has been closely related to the Tantras. A vagueness thickens round the word Tantra as used in common parlance. But without being entangled in its mesh of heterogeneous elements, we may say that while the different philosophic systems deal with the nature of reality and the proper method for its realization, the whole emphasis of the Tantra, as a religious science, is on the practical methods for realizing the truth. How can the Mother be realized? "Mainly through *yantras* and *mantras* (i.e. rituals)," will be the reply of a Tāntrika.

We may, for our purpose, describe the *mantras* of the Mother as the sound-representations of the Mother. In the process of becoming of the Being, the first stage, we have noticed, is marked by self-activity in the form of determination (*saṁkalpa*), which results in a will; this will develops itself into a full-fledged 'I-ness' (*ahaṁtā*) of God, which is the state of Shakti. The next stage is a stage of sound (*nāda*), cosmic vibration or rhythm, which finds further expression in the visible world-process. The letters of the alphabet are the perceptible forms of the differentiated cosmic vibrations. These letters are, therefore, called not the Mother herself, but Mātṛikās, the mothers who attend the great Mother and approximate her to a great extent. The Purāṇic conception of the Mātṛikās thus underwent a great transformation in the Tantras. Rāmprasād, a great worshipper of the Mother and a Bengalee devotional poet of the eighteenth century, exclaimed in an exquisite lyric that Kālī, the Mother, contains in her the fifty letters (the Indian vowels and consonants), and she takes a name in every one of the letters. In the Tāntrika way of worshipping the Mother there is a practice called *aṅga-nyāsa,* or the consecration of the different parts of the body to the Mother. In this there is the custom of placing the different letters, both vowels and consonants, as the Mātṛikās on the different parts of the body. The significance is to feel that every part even of the physical body, with all the biological processes going on within, belongs really to the Mother and nothing to the man who is said to possess the body.

Yantra means a machine or medium through which the truth is to be realized. The human body is, according to the Tāntrikas, the best medium for realizing the truth. This body is not merely a thing in the universe, it is an epitome of the universe, a microcosm in relation to the macrocosm. There is therefore nothing in the universe which is not there in the body of a man. With this idea in view the Tāntrika *sādhakas* have tried to discover the most important rivers in the nerve-system of man, the mountains specially in the spinal chord, and the prominent *tīrthas* (holy places) in different parts of the body, and the sun and the moon—time-element of the exterior universe in all its phases as day and night, fortnight, month and year—have often been explained with reference to the course of the vital wind (*prāṇa* and *apāna,* exhalation and inhalation). The human form is thus the abode of the truth of which the universe is the manifestation in infinite space and eternal time. Instead of being lost in the vastness of the incomprehensible universe and groping in its unfathomable mystery, a Tāntrika *sādhaka* prefers to concentrate his attention on himself and to realize the truth hidden in this body with the clear conviction that the truth that is realized within is the same truth that pervades and controls the whole universe.

The great Mother has two polar extremities: one the grossly physical plane, where she seems to be shrouded by her own created matter, coiled and fast asleep; the other is her perfectly awakened state, the state of highest bliss and illumination, which is one and the same with Shiva, the Godhead. According to Tāntrika *sādhanā,* the *mūlādhāra-chakra* (sacro-coccygeal plexus), the lowest of the plexuses, represents this gross physical plane while the *sahasrāra,* the highest plexus in the cerebral region, represents the plane of perfect divine realization. The *sādhanā* consists first in awakening the Mother in the lowest plane, and this rousing of the Mother in a yogic process enables one to find out the Mother in the lowest plane, even in the lowest form of animal existence. The upward motion of the Mother is then realized in and through all the intermediate states, and the supreme realization is attained in the highest plane. The *sādhanā* does not end here; the realization of the Mother as supreme bliss and illumination must not be kept confined in the highest plane alone; the perfect realization of the Mother must be made possible in all the lower planes, even in the lowest. The implication in a wider sphere is that religion, in the form of perfect divine realization, must not be pursued merely through a process of negation—a negation of the lower, even the lowest plane of our animal existence; the lowest and the highest must be made equal by the perfect realization of the Mother equally everywhere.

This truth seems to have been demonstrated in the life of Rāmprasād, who made the great Mother, as the popular tradition goes, come down to him in flesh and blood in the form of his



MAHĀKĀLĪ
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beloved young daughter and help him in the construction of his thatched hut.

3. Reputed Shākta Sādhakas

The *sādhanā* of Rāmprasād and numerous other *sādhakas* of the eighteenth and earlier centuries found fulfilment and wider expression in the life and teachings of Shrī Ramakṛishṇa of Dakṣhiṇeshwar in the nineteenth century. It often seems an interesting paradox to the ordinary mind how a brahmin priest, worshipping the stone image of Mother Kālī in a temple of Bengal, should succeed in raising a common platform where all the religions may meet. The paradox can be solved only by understanding the true nature of the Mother as conceived by these Indian saints, and also by understanding the true significance of the worship of the Mother. To Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa as well as to Rāmprasād, of whose devotional lyrics on the Mother and her worship Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa was very fond, the Mother was the same as Brahman, the Absolute. But to Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa the Absolute was true—and equally so—in all Its aspects—as the unqualified as also the qualified, as the inactive as also the active, as the formless as also the one capable of having all kinds of forms, as the Power (Shakti) as also the possessor of the Power (Shaktimat). Meditation on or worship of God in some of His particular forms as God or the Goddess is a special religious attitude, which slightly and congenially tinges the supreme divine realization without disturbing its purity and tranquillity in any way.

Complete surrender to the will of God, to the power of God, was the watchward of the Mother worship practised by Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa. The whole spirit is nicely embodied in a saying attributed to the great saint, "Don't go on saying *āmār, āmār, āmār* (this is mine), for the *ā* in the word is the root-cause of all disturbances ; it is the *upasarga* (literally, a prefix that changes the meanings of words ; hence an obnoxious addition) ; cast it off and then go on saying *mār, mār, mār* (Mother's), that is, everything belongs to the Mother and to none else. This complete surrender to the Mother brought about with it a realization of unity—a unity not only with all men, but with all the beings, as children of the same universal Mother, or individual sparks from the same dynamo.

This has added a great humanitarian tone to the religion preached by Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, where service to humanity has been recognized as the best form of worshipping the Mother.

Complete surrender to the will and power of God is the watchword of the Mother worship emphasized also by Shrī Aurobindo. By his lifelong spiritual practice he brought out the deep significance of the Tāntrika *sādhanā* of Shakti and propounded it anew from his own philosophical point of view of the Descent of the Divine. About this surrender to the Mother he said, "There must be a total and sincere surrender; there must be an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power; there must be a constant and integral choice of the Truth that is descending, a constant and integral rejection of the falsehood of the mental, vital and physical Powers and Appearances that still rule the earth-Nature.

"The surrender must be total and seize all the parts of the being. It is not enough that the psychic should respond and the higher mental accept or even the inner vital submit and the inner physical consciousness feel the influence. There must be in no part of the being, even the most external, anything that makes a reserve, anything that hides behind doubts, confusions and subterfuges, anything that revolts or refuses."[27] And "In proportion as the surrender and self-consecration progress, the Sādhaka becomes conscious of the Divine Shakti doing the Sādhanā, pouring into him more and more of herself, founding in him the freedom and perfection of the Divine Nature."[28]

Again it has been said, "All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme; your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works. You must grow in the divine consciousness till there is no difference between your will and hers, no motive except her impulsion in you, no action that is not her conscious action in you and through you."[29]

This sacrifice of the individual to the Supreme may not be possible all at once—it may proceed in three gradual stages. "Until you are capable of this complete dynamic identification, you have to regard yourself as a soul and body created for her service, one who does all for her sake."[30] "There must be no demand for fruit and no seeking for reward; the only fruit for you is the pleasure of the Divine Mother and the fulfilment of her work, your only reward a constant progression in divine consciousness and calm and strength and bliss."[31] In the second stage a time soon comes when the *sādhaka* will feel more and more that he is the instrument and not the worker. "And afterwards you will realize that the divine Shakti not only inspires and guides, but initiates and carries out your works; all your movements are originated by her, all your powers are hers, mind, life and body are conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe."[32] "The last stage of this perfection will come when you are completely identified with the Divine Mother and feel yourself to be no longer another and separate being, instrument, servant or worker, but truly a child and eternal portion of her consciousness and force. Always she will be in you and you in her; it will be your constant, simple and natural experience that all your thought and seeing and action, your very breathing or moving come from her and are hers. You will know and see and feel that you are a person and power formed by her out of herself, put out from her for the play and yet always safe in her, being of her being, consciousness of her consciousness, force of her force, Ānanda of her Ānanda."[33]

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[27] *The Mother*, pp. 2-4. [28] *Ibid.* p. 13. [29] *Ibid.* pp. 27-8.

Herein is revealed the true significance of Mother worship in India.

4. CONCLUSION

A few words before we conclude. They are on the human mother. If it be a fact, as the modern trend is to believe, that it is the human mother who has given rise to the Divine Mother, it has to be admitted on the other side that the Divine Mother in her turn, or in return, has added majesty and glory to the human mother. It may be said to be an ingrained belief in the mind of an average cultured Indian that the human mother is an incarnation, a descent in condescension, of the Divine Mother. The Indian belief in this respect has been nicely given expression to by a Bengalee poet who says that as the infinite sky above is reflected even in the water that is deposited in the hole made on the way by a cow's hoof, so also the great divine Mother reflects herself in any and every mother on earth. This explains the general Indian tendency towards the deification of the mother in the social, and even in the domestic life. Not only the mother, but women, as a class, are regarded as the incarnation of the Devī. Even when she is not a mother, but an unmarried girl of tender age, she is the Devī as Kanyā-Kumārī; when she fulfils the duties of a religious vow to have a husband of her liking, she is Umā carrying on penance to win Shiva as her husband. The prevalence of this religious belief has exerted a tremendous influence on the evolution of the moral consciousness of the whole Indian nation. Mother worship influenced even the patriotic sentiment of the Indians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Great Mother is the Earth-goddess and as such is identified with the mother country. This will explain the blending of the religious sentiment with the patriotic, and so far as Bengal of the nineteenth century is concerned, the political consciousness of the people was deeply blended with the religious consciousness, and the national hymn composed by Baṅkim Chandra, "Hail to thee, my Mother" (*Vande Mātaram*), is a clear index to the pervasion of the political by the religious sentiment.

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[30] *Ibid.* p. 28.

[31] *Ibid.* pp. 28-9.

[32] *Ibid.* p. 30.

[33] *Ibid.* pp. 32-3.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

1. General Introduction

The culture and civilization of a nation, it is a truism to point out, are inextricably bound up with the goal of knowledge aimed at, the methods of instruction propounded, and finally the actual standard of education reached by it. Thus, education, so to speak, is the very heart of a nation, around which pulsate its other multifarious activities and achievements, from which spring its very life and sustenance, through which is manifested its inner vigour and vitality—what is great and good, noble and sublime in it. Accordingly, the study of a nation's soul means really the study of its educational aims and ideals, methods and systems, achievements and perfections.

This is more so with regard to women's education. From every point of view, women are really equal halves of men. But unfortunately society has a tendency to treat the so-called biologically 'weaker sex' as weaker intellectually no less, and on that ground deprive it of its legitimate equal rights with the 'stronger sex' in all spheres—domestic, social, political and cultural. This has been specially manifested in the history of almost all the ancient nations of the world. Because of this very temptation to rule over the 'weaker sex', in common with other 'weaker' sections of society (e.g. the Shūdras or the toiling mass), a study of the treatment meted out to those who belong to the so-called lower strata of society, is of supreme interest, showing, as it does, the inherent culture, good sense and sense of justice and fair play of that nation.

It is, however, a matter of great pride and glory to us all that the Indian nation, right from the dawn of human civilization, never took advantage of this biological weakness of women to subject them to unwarrantable social and political disabilities. After the Vedic Age, the refulgent golden age of women's all-round supreme progress and perfection, there was, no doubt, a temporary deterioration in the status of women during the dark period of the Smṛiti Age. But that was due more to conventional usage springing from the exigencies of political and other situations, than to the actual letter and spirit of the Smṛiti injunctions themselves. For is it not the *Manu-smṛiti* itself, the most respected and one of the most ancient of all Smṛitis, that pays the greatest homage to women in the ever-memorable verse?

> *"Yatra nāryastu pūjyante ramante tatra devatāḥ*
> *Yatraitāstu na pūjyante sarvāstatrāphalāḥ kriyāḥ"*
>
> (*Manu-smṛiti,* 3. 56 ; cf. *Mahābhārata,* 13. 45. 5)

"Where women are worshipped, there the gods are delighted ; but where they are not worshipped, all religious ceremonies become futile."

It is therefore no exaggeration to say that India has always honoured women,—created, according to the celebrated *Bṛihad-āraṇyaka Upanishad* (1. 4. 3), for example, by the *ātman* or the Supreme Soul as equal halves of men, thereby completing them, like halves of a shell completing the whole shell (*"ardha-vṛigalamiva"*), and filling up the void in their lives—not only as equal partners of men but, what is more, also as infinitely superior to men in their inherent and special rights as mothers, the very pivots of domestic and social life in India from time immemorial.

In the sphere of education, too, women in India have, from the beginning, been given equal opportunities with men to develop the full potentialities of their nature, in different spheres of life, mundane and extra-mundane.

2. General System of Education in the Vedic Age

Before we take up the supremely important and interesting question of women's education in ancient India, we have to know something regarding the general system of education in vogue then ; for then only can we discuss the question whether the same system was equally applicable to both boys and girls, or whether a different system was propounded for girls alone.

The educational system of ancient India may legitimately claim to be unique in the world in many respects. This system, again, springs from the equally unique nature of education and its aim, as propounded in India alone.

From time immemorial, India has unequivocally recognized one and only one *summum bonum* or supreme goal of life, viz. self-realization. This means the realization of the Life Eternal—a Life of perfect Existence, perfect Knowledge and perfect Bliss (*Sachchidānanda*). Hence it is that in India the aim of education has always been the attainment of such a fullness of Being (*bhūman*). Education here has never been objective or practical in the narrow sense of the term, that is, being confined only to mundane subjects and objective arts and crafts. These should be studied, no doubt, but the final aim of education is *mokṣha* or *mukti*—the attainment of a Life Immortal, and not of worldly success and prosperity.

But at the same time, it has also been recognized in India that although the final goal is the same, yet different individuals have naturally different inclinations and capacities. Hence it is that India has always taken special pains to provide for the numerous grades of human beings by recommending different paths for different individuals. That is why here not only the highest philosophy but also ordinary subjects, like literature and science as also vocational training, find a place. Those who were found unfit to proceed straight to the path of highest knowledge, were directed to their proper vocations, but not condemned as hopeless.

From the above two specialities of Indian thought and culture follows another of its peculiar features, viz. its inherent individualism. The Indian system of education, if anything, is cultural to the backbone ; and culture is a matter of individual striving and attainment. Hence the ordinary lecture type of education, in vogue in the world today, is foreign to the very spirit of Indian education. Education, India has always recognized, must be more of the seminar type, where each student has to meet the teacher separately and learn from him through separate instruction, guidance and discussions.

The Indian educational system lays great stress on the absolute necessity of a personal relation between the teacher and the taught. In a mechanical, stereotyped system of education the relation between a teacher and his pupils is no more intimate than that between a speaker in a large meeting and his audience, and accordingly lacks entirely the feeling of living fellowship, the spirit of loving give-and-take that alone can make education, with its two sides—teaching and learning—fruitful in any real sense of the term. Hence very wisely India has always insisted on a close personal relation between teachers and students.

From the above follows another special characteristic of the system of education in ancient India, viz. that in those days, education was fully and compulsorily residential. The pupil, during the whole duration of his studentship, had to live in the home of the teacher as a member of his family, as one of his own, as, in fact, his very son. He had to learn not only from the spoken words or lectures of his teacher, but more from his living example, from the whole of his unique personality, manifested in the daily walks of life. Thus, learning in his case was not confined to a few hours in the class-room, but was spread over to every moment of his life in the house of the teacher.

Education then was absolutely free. That is, the student had to pay no fees at all to the teacher for being taught ; on the contrary, it was thought the bounden duty, nay the sacred privilege, of the teacher himself to teach, house, feed and clothe his pupils free of charge.

The Indian system of education always upheld the dignity of labour. Hence even a student aiming at the highest philosophical knowledge was duty-bound to do some manual labour daily, such as collecting fuel, tending the cattle, tending the sacred fire and begging.

That education was essentially ethical and religious in its tone and contents, is clear from the very designation of the student as a *brahmachārin,* meaning one who not only knows about Brahman, but also practises the way of Brahman. This is supported by the sacred ceremony of *upanayana,* which preceded this period of *brahmacharya* or religious studentship. Through this ceremony, the student becomes a *dwija,* a twice-born ; that is, being impregnated with the spirit of the teacher, who holds him, so to speak, within him for three days, the student gives up his former thoughtless, purposeless, ordinary life and starts afresh a spiritual, dedicated life of noble thoughts, sentiments and actions.

3. Women's Education in the Vedic Age

(I) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

We can now take up the very interesting question whether the above general system of ancient Indian education was also applicable to the case of women. From evidences available, there can be no doubt that it was definitely so. The above system of studentship, technically called *brahmacharya,* consists of, as we have seen, the following main factors:

The pupil is formally admitted to studentship by the teacher through a ceremony called *upanayana.* This alone (as later on strictly enforced, though perhaps not so in the early Vedic period) entitles the student to read the Vedas and utter Vedic *mantras.*

The pupil resides in the house of the teacher for several years (generally twelve) till he completes studentship.

During this period, he wears certain external signs—like the *ajina* or skin of an animal (mainly deer skin), *valkala* or bark, *daṇḍa* or wooden staff, *mẹkhalā* or grass girdle, *upavīta* or the sacred thread and *jaṭā* or matted locks—and performs certain external duties, like begging, apart from his internal duties of study, meditation and the rest.

The first question, thus, here is whether women in ancient India were entitled to the very important rite of *upanayana,* which would give them the right to study the Vedas just like men. In later ages, they were unfortunately barred from it and thereby from Vedic education, which, however, practically ended in the denial of all kinds of education to them. What is the real view of the Hindu scriptures? There can be no doubt that the scriptures themselves make no distinction between human beings on the ground of sex only; and that they were simply misinterpreted later on, mainly through ignorance, sometimes through prejudice.

(II) WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VEDIC STUDENTSHIP

A. DIRECT EVIDENCE

Before, however, taking up the question of initiation, we may profitably try to find out whether there is any direct reference to women's right to *brahmacharya* or studentship and education in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature.

Right in the *Atharva-Veda* (11. 5. 18), it is said as clearly as possible that a maiden wins a young husband through *brahmacharya* or Vedic studentship: *"Brahmacharyeṇa kanyā yuvānam vindate patim."* This passage is a very important one, being the only Vedic passage which directly refers to women's right to studentship and education. But that is nothing strange, considering the fact that of all the four Vedas, the *Atharva-Veda* is the only one to expound and extol this famous system of *brahmacharya*, the very life-blood of ancient Indian system of education. Much later, Hārīta, a well known lawgiver, directly refers to the study of the Vedas by women.

In the *Āshwalāyana Gṛihya-sūtra* (3. 8. 11), again, it is said in connection with the ceremony of *samāvartana*, or return after the completion of Vedic studies, that after having smeared the hands with ointment, a Brāhmaṇa should first apply it to his face, a Kṣhatriya to his arms, a Vaishya to his belly, a woman to her lower parts and those who earn their livelihood by running to their thighs. This definitely proves the right of women to Vedic studies.

According to Hārīta, in the case of women, *samāvartana* took place before puberty (*"Prāgrajasaḥ samāvartanam iti Hārītoktyā—Saṁskāra-prakāsha*, p. 404).

In later literature also, we find a direct reference to women wearing the holy thread (*yajñopavīta*) in Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Kādambarī* (7th century A.D.). Here Mahāshwetā is described as one whose body has been rendered pure by the wearing of a *brahma-sūtra* or holy thread (Part 1, par. 133).

B. INDIRECT EVIDENCE

In the *White Yajur-Veda* (26. 2), there is a beautiful, catholic passage which permits all equally to receive Vedic knowledge. The sage says, "I desire to impart this auspicious message (*vācham kalyāṇīm*) to all—to Brāhmaṇas and Rājanyas (Kṣhatriyas), Shūdras and Vaishyas, friends and foes." Thus it includes women.

This is further proved by the numerous cases of highly educated and cultured women of the Vedic Age and later periods.

(III) WOMEN'S RIGHT TO INITIATION

A. DIRECT EVIDENCE

The injunctions regarding *upanayana* or the holy ceremony of initiation are contained in the *Gṛihya-sūtras,* composed in the post-Vedic period (between 6th and 3rd centuries B.C.), like, "A Brāhmaṇa is to be initiated at the age of eight" (e.g. *Āshwalāyana Gṛihya-sūtra,* 1. 19. 1, etc.). Here the crucial question is whether these injunctions, containing as they do the masculine gender only, also intend to include the cases of women or not. But the fact is that injunctions, rules, laws, etc., especially ancient ones, are generally framed in such a way as to mention explicitly males only ; but that being a general practice, it would be manifestly wrong, if not absurd, to stick to the literal meaning only and exclude women from the purview of the laws and injunctions in question. Take, for example, the famous Vedic injunction, *"Swargakāmo yajeta"* (A man who desires heaven should perform sacrifices). Here, although the masculine gender is found, really it refers to both the sexes, as other well known lawgivers and Jaimini himself admit. It really means, *"Yaḥ swarga-kāmaḥ sa yajeta"*—whoever is desirous of heaven should perform sacrifices.

This is made clear by Kātyāyana when he says, *"Strī cha, avisheṣhāt"* (*Kātyāyana Shrauta-sūtra,* 1. 1. 7), meaning, as the above injunction does not intend to specify a man only, a woman is equally entitled to perform sacrifices.

Mādhavāchārya also in his *Nyāya-mālā-vistara* explicitly states that "Brāhmaṇa boys of eight are to be initiated and taught. Girls also have the same rights."

Apart from the above general evidence, many specific proofs are also available in this respect. It is enough to mention just a few.

Āshwalāyana, in the section on *nāmakaraṇa* or christening says: "A name also should be given to him, consisting of either two syllables (if his material prosperity is desired), or four syllables (if his spiritual perfection is desired). Males should be given names consisting of an even number of syllables. Females should be given names consisting of an odd number of syllables. Further, an *abhivādanīya* name should be given, and this should be known only to the parents till the time of *upanayana*" (*Āshwalāyana Gṛihya-sūtra,* 1. 15. 4). Here it is explicitly said that both the boy and the girl should be given two names at the time of the christening ceremony —an ordinary name to be used by all (called *sāṁvyavahārika* name), and another secret name to be revealed to the teacher at the time of *upanayana* when the child bows down to him (called *abhivādanīya* name).

Another well known lawgiver of the post-Vedic Age, Gobhila, expressly says[1] in connection with the marriage ceremony that the bridegroom should lead the bride properly clothed and wearing the sacred thread. How, then, can there be any doubt that women, too, were entitled to be initiated with the sacred thread, just like men?

Many other direct evidences may be cited, but the above are quite sufficient to show that in ancient India, right from the Vedic Age, women, in common with men, had absolute right to be initiated and, thereby, to be admitted to *brahmacharya* or religious studentship and full education.

B. INDIRECT EVIDENCE

(a) *Women's Right to utter Mantras or Sacred Formulae in Vedic Rites*: Without being initiated formally, no one is entitled to utter Vedic *mantras* in Vedic rites. But numerous instances may be cited from the Vedic literature itself to show that women—unmarried girls, wives, mothers and widows—were entitled to utter *mantras* in various sacrifices, *gṛihya* (domestic) as well as *shrauta* (non-domestic). In the case of an unmarried girl, of course, only a single direct example is found in the *Yajur-Veda*; and that is nothing strange, since neither a boy nor a girl could perform sacrifices in his or her own right, before being married (except, of course, in the case of those, of both sexes, who chose to practise the vow of celibacy all through life).

In the case of a wife, however, as natural, Vedic ritualistic literature abounds in examples of her participating in sacrifices with her husband and uttering *mantras*. The very word *patnī* (wife) etymologically means one who participates in sacrifices (*Pāṇini*, 4. 1. 33).

Even independently of men, women used to perform the *Sītā-yajña* or the harvest sacrifice, where many Vedic verses were recited, that, according to *Pāraskara Gṛihya-sūtra* (2. 17), being the long-standing custom. Harihara in his commentary on the *Āgrahāyaṇī-karma* section of that book (3. 2) says: *"Atra strīṇām api mantra-pāṭhaḥ"* i.e. *"Purushāṇāṁ strīṇāṁ sarveshāṁ mantra-pāṭhaḥ"*—men and women, all are equally entitled to utter *mantras.*

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[1] *Gobhila Gṛihya-sūtra*, 7. 2. 1. 19; cf. *Ṛig-Veda*, 10. 85. 41; *Atharva-Veda*, 14. 2. 4.

(b) *Learned Women in the Vedic and post-Vedic Ages*: The very high standard of learning and culture reached by Indian women during the Vedic Age, and also during the Sūtra (*Gṛihya* and *Shrauta*) period, is too well known a fact to require detailed exposition. It is indeed a matter of legitimate pride to us all that the *Ṛig-Veda,* the earliest literature in the world, contains hymns composed by as many as twenty-seven *brahmavādinīs* or women seers, viz. Ghoṣhā, Godhā, Vishwavārā, Apālā, etc. (*Bṛihad-devatā,* 11. 84). One of the seers, Vāch, the daughter of the sage Ambhṛiṇa, realizes her oneness with the Absolute, and cries out in delight: "I am the sovereign queen. . . . He who eats does so through me; he who sees, breathes or hears does so through me. Creating all things, I blow forth like the wind. Beyond heaven, beyond the earth am I—so vast is my greatness" (*Ṛig-Veda,* 10. 125). The acquisition of such supreme philosophical realization on the part of a woman, at the very dawn of human civilization, is unparalleled in the history of the world.

During the age of the Upaniṣhads, too, the same high standard as found in the early Vedic period is maintained unimpaired. Of the learned women of this age, the name of Gārgī, daughter of the sage Vachaknu, stands out as the brightest luminary (*Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad,* 3. 6; 3. 8). In the third chapter of this Upaniṣhad, we find King Janaka offering a thousand cows to the most learned Brāhmaṇa. Of all the Brāhmaṇas, Yājñavalkya alone dared to claim this reward, whereupon he was challenged and closely questioned on deep philosophical topics by eight celebrated scholars, including Gārgī. But to the glory of Indian womanhood, Gārgī was the only one among them who had the courage to question Yājñavalkya twice, and it was on her advice that the Brāhmaṇas acknowledged him to be the best knower of Brahman.

In the same Upaniṣhad, we meet another very cultured woman, Maitreyī, who by her bold utterance, "What should I do with that (worldly wealth) through which I cannot be immortal?" (*Bṛih. Up.* 2. 4. 3), has herself become immortal. When Yājñavalkya wanted to divide his property between his two wives, Kātyāyanī and Maitreyī, the latter refused, as above, mundane prosperity, and was, as a result, favoured by her husband with a most learned discourse on the unity of the Self.

In the *Kena Upanishad* (3. 12) Umā Haimavatī discourses on Brahman. The *Kaushītaki Brāhmaṇa* (7. 6) mentions a learned lady, Pathyāswasti, who travelled all the way to the north to study and obtained the title of 'Vāch' or the goddess of learning for her scholarship.

The *Ṛig-Vedic Gṛihya-sūtras,* viz. *Āshwalāyana* (3. 4. 4) and *Shāṅkhāyana* (4. 10), mention three women sages, Gārgī Vāchaknavī, Vaḍavā Prātītheyī and Sulabhā Maitreyī. Perhaps the last one is referred to in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣhya,* commentary on *Pāṇini,* as Saulabhānī Brāhmaṇānī (4. 3. 105).

The later age of Pāṇini (5th century B.C.), too, is resplendent with a galaxy of women scholars and teachers of repute. Teaching by women was so common in those days that a special term was coined for women teachers, viz. *upādhyāyā* or *upādhyāyī*[2] and *āchāryā* as distinguished from *upādhyāyānī* and *āchāryānī,* denoting wives of teachers.[3] Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣhita in his *Siddhānta-kaumudī* explains the former terms as "she who herself is a teacher." Vāsudeva Dīkṣhita in his *Bālamanoramā* (Vol. I, pp. 379-80) also supports the same view. Pāṇini himself refers to women students of different branches of the Vedas. Thus, the women students of the Kaṭha school were called *Kaṭhī ; Bahvṛichī* designates women students of the *Ṛig-Veda* (*Bālamanoramā* and *Kāshikā*).

According to Patañjali, a brahmin woman who studies the grammar of Āpishali is called *āpishalā* ;[4] and a brahmin woman who studies the Mīmāṁsā work of Kāshakṛitsna is called *kāshakṛitsnā.*[5] He also explains the formation of the word *audamegha* as meaning a pupil of a woman teacher called Audameghyā.

All these prove that women of those days were not only great scholars of even very difficult subjects like grammar and Mīmāṁsā, but also famous teachers having such a large number of students as to necessitate the coining of special words to denote them.

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[2] Kātyāyana's *Vārttika,* 125 ; see also *Kāshikā* on *Pāṇini,* 4. 1. 59 and 3. 3. 21.

[3] Kātyāyana's *Vārttika,* 2477.

[4] *Mahābhāṣhya* on *Vārttika,* 3 ; on *Pāṇini,* 4. 1. 14. Vol. 2, p. 205. Banaras Ed.

[5] *Loc. cit.* on *Vārttika,* 5 ; on *Pāṇini,* 4. 1. 14. p. 249.

From the above very brief account, it is clear that right from the *Ṛig-Vedic* Age, the women of India took their due share, as equal partners with men, in all spheres, especially, the intellectual and the cultural. Hence it is absurd to suggest, as is done strangely in all seriousness later on, that women are not at all entitled to equal facilities of study and education with men. When we find women composing Vedic hymns of the highest intellectual and poetic acumen, when we find them challenging men in open courts on most subtle philosophical discussions, when we find them as teachers, on their own rights, of profound metaphysical doctrines, when we find them studying and learning from their teachers the deepest truths of life and reaching the highest standard of education and knowledge—is it not manifestly ridiculous to hold: *"Amantrā hi striyo matāḥ"*—"Women are not entitled to utter *mantras*" (Baudhāyana, as quoted in the *Shrāddha-tattwa* of the famous lawgiver Raghunandana. *Smṛiti-tattwa,* Vol. I, p. 298).

The great veneration in which these women scholars and teachers were held is proved by the fact that during the daily *ṛishi-tarpaṇa* or offering of water-libations to sages, amongst a host of male sages, water is offered to three women sages also, viz. Gārgī Vāchaknavī, Vaḍavā Prātītheyī and Sulabhā Maitreyī (*Āshwalāyana Gṛihya-sūtra,* 3. 4. 4.).

From the above account, there cannot remain any vestige of doubt that right from the *Ṛig-Vedic* Age, women were fully entitled to *upanayana* and *brahmacharya,* initiation and Vedic studentship, equally with men.

(IV) SYSTEM OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

The next question to be discussed is whether the general system of education for boys was equally and *in toto* adopted in the case of girls also. In the case of boys, as we have seen, education was compulsorily residential, that is, they had to reside in the houses of their teachers, wearing certain external signs and symbols of studentship, like the girdle and matted locks, and doing certain daily duties, like begging. The question here is whether women, too, were subject to the very same rules and regulations, and whether they had to reside with their teachers. Unfortunately, no direct evidence is available with regard to this point. But from the following two famous Smṛiti passages or extracts from the laws of the celebrated lawgivers Yama and Hārīta, we get some indications regarding this.

The passage from Yama, as quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya Saṁskāra-prakāsha*, pp. 402-3, is as follows:

> *"Purākalpe kumārīṇāṁ mauñjī-bandhanam iṣhyate,*
> *Adhyāpanañcha vedānāṁ sāvitṛī-vāchanantathā.*
> *Pitā pitṛivyo bhrātā vā naināṁ adhyāpayet paraḥ;*
> *Swagṛihe chaiva kanyāyā bhaikṣha-charyā vidhīyate;*
> *Varjayed ajinañchīraṁ jaṭā-dhāraṇam eva cha."*

The passage from Hārīta is as follows: *"Dwividhāḥ striyo brahmavādinyaḥ sadyovadhwashcha. Tatra brahmavādinīnām upanayanam agnīndhanaṁ vedādhyayanaṁ swagṛihe cha bhikṣhā-charyeti. Sadyovadhūnām tūpasthite vivāhe kathaṁchid-upanayana-mātraṁ kṛitvā vivāhaḥ kāryaḥ"* (*Saṁskāra-ratnamālā*, Vol. I, p. 165. Quoted in *Smṛitichandrikā*, Saṁskāra-kāṇḍa; *Vīramitrodaya Saṁskāra-prakāsha*).

The passages mean as follows: "In ancient times the tying of the girdle was prescribed for girls, so also the teaching of the Vedas (to them) and the utterance of the *sāvitrī* (*gāyatrī*). (But now) no one should teach them except their fathers, brothers or uncles; the vow of begging should be practised by them only within the limits of their own houses; further, the wearing of deerskins, barks and matted locks should be given up by them" (Yama).

"Women are of two types: *brahmavādinīs* or those who discourse about Brahman, and *sadyovadhūs* or those who are to become brides soon. Of these, the *brahmavādinīs* are entitled to initiation, sacrifice to Fire, study of the Vedas and observance of begging alms in their own homes. But the *sadyovadhūs* are only initiated before they are married" (*Hārīta*).

These two passages are very important, being the only ones of their kind and giving us an inkling into the practice in ancient times. Yama prescribes for his own time that girls should study at home from their own relatives and be spared from most of the hardships of boys, such as wearing barks.

The second passage, from Hārīta, also clearly shows that women, whether intending to lead a life of celibate studentship or desiring married life, are entitled to initiation, the former being further entitled to Vedic studies, rituals and the utterance of Vedic *mantras.*

It is clear from the above that, in ancient times, women, too, used to reside in the houses of their teachers after initiation, wear the external signs of studentship and perform the daily prescribed duties. But in course of time, in the case of girls, teaching by outsiders came to be deprecated, not to speak of residential teaching, as also the imposition of certain hard practices of external austerity. Thus, the first step of bringing girls away from the healthy external influences of great and good teachers and confining them within their parents' houses, was taken. And, still later, this process of confinement was completed when physical confinement came to be accompanied by mental confinement—when, in other words, the education of girls practically ceased.

In later literature also, some indications may be found that girls, too, resided in the houses of their teachers. From the *Uttara-Rāma-charita* of Bhavabhūti (Act II), we come to know that Ātreyī resided in the hermitage of Vālmīki with Lava and Kusha and studied the Vedic literature with them. But when she could not keep pace with those exceptionally intelligent boys, she left the hermitage and travelled all the way from the north to the Daṇḍaka forest in the south to learn the Vedānta from Agastya and other sages. In the *Mālatī-Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti (Act I), again, the Buddhist nun Kāmandakī herself narrates that people from all parts of the country flocked to her place for instruction and coaching.

All these are sufficient hints to prove that women in ancient India not only resided in the houses of their venerable teachers, but sometimes also themselves kept and instructed students of both sexes. Marriage was by no means compulsory for them, and the special Vedic term *amājur,* meaning an unmarried woman (e.g. Ghoṣhā: *Ṛig-Veda,* 1. 117. 7 ; 2. 17. 7 ; 10. 39. 3 ; 8. 21. 15), shows that not a few of them preferred a life of single blessedness. The Vedic *brahmavādinīs,* who dedicated the whole of their lives to the pursuit of Truth, were, in fact, not only by far the earliest but at the same time among the best of all women ascetics of the world.

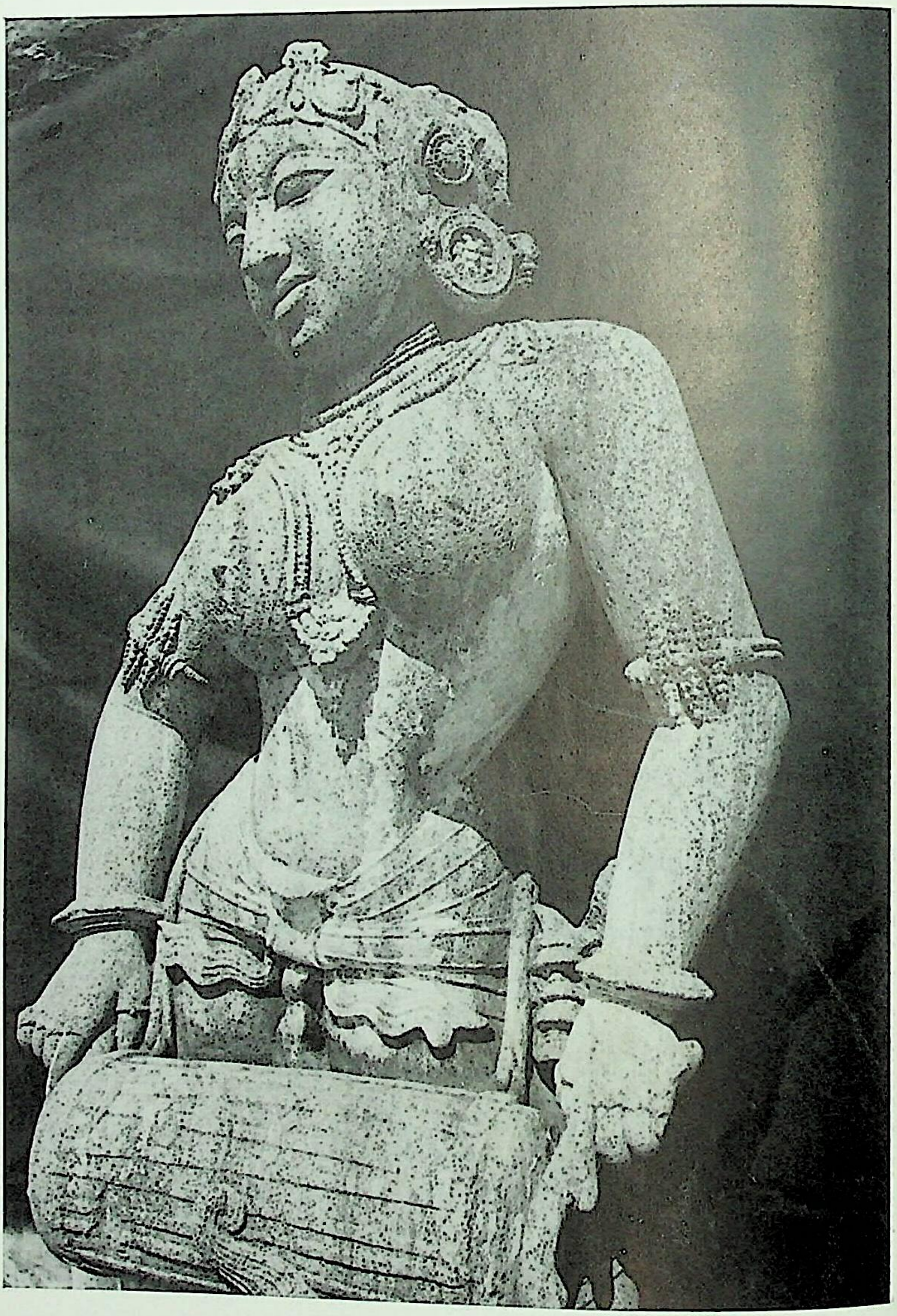
(v) COURSES OF STUDY FOR WOMEN IN THE VEDIC AND POST-VEDIC AGES

As we have seen that during ancient times, men and women were afforded equal opportunities for study, there can be little doubt that the courses of study for both were practically the same. Especially in the field of higher studies, women, too, studied the Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣhads, together with the Vedāṅgas, which are enumerated in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣhad* (1. 1. 5) as *shikṣhā* or the science of pronunciation and recitation, *kalpa* or method of performance of the Vedic rituals, *vyākaraṇa* or grammar, *nirukta* or etymology, *chhandas* or metre, *jyotiṣha* or astronomy. The four Vedas and these Vedāṅgas are, however, characterized as *aparā vidyā* or lower knowledge, while the knowledge of the Imperishable One (*akṣhara*) alone is called *parā vidyā* or supreme knowledge. In the *Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad* (7. 1. 2), Nārada mentions twenty branches of study which he has mastered, such as the four Vedas, epics, mythology, grammar, the science of obsequies, mathematics, divination, chronology, logic, polity, theology, the science of sacred knowledge, demonology, military science, astrology, the science of snake-charming and the fine arts. But these, he also points out, have enabled him to be only a *mantravid* or a knower of the scriptures, and not an *ātmavid* or a knower of the Self.

There is no doubt that women, too, studied both the *aparā* and the *parā vidyā*, and rose to be, as shown very briefly above, great scholars, seers and teachers.

Women were also given full facilities for secular education no less than men. That the women of India were taught and became experts in the art of writing, becomes clear from the hymns of the Vedic women seers—for these hymns, apart from their value from the philosophic and other points of view, are also pieces of literary perfection, breathing a depth of feeling, originality of expression and freshness of style amazing in so very early compositions.

This poetic tradition was fortunately continued till a later age, and Hāla's famous anthology of verses *Gāthā-saptashatī* (1st century B.C.) contains verses by eight Prākṛita poetesses, like Anulakṣhmī,



MAIDEN PLAYING ON A DRUM

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Asuladdhī, Mādhavī, Prahatā, Revā, Rohā, Shashiprabhā and Baddhāvahī.

Women were also taught many fine arts, especially singing, playing on instruments and dancing. Even in the Vedic rituals, women took a prominent part for their aptitude in music. Probably, they were taught music as a part of their *Sāma-Vedic* education. In the *Ṛig-Veda* (9. 66. 8), women are found to sing on ceremonial occasions. In the Mahāvrata, wives sing and play on various kinds of instruments (9. 56. 3). *Satyāṣhādha Shrauta-sūtra* (16. 6. 21), *Shāṅkhāyana Shrauta-sūtra* (17. 3. 14), *Lāṭyāyana Shrauta-sūtra* (4. 6), etc. mention a long list of difficult instruments, played by women, like *apaghāṭalikā*, *tāluka-vīṇā*, *kāṇḍa-vīṇā*, and *pichhorā*. *Lāṭyāyana Shrauta-sūtra* (4. 2. 5) points out that wives should sit to the west of the *udgātṛī* (chanter) and play the lutes alternately. According to the *Varāha Gṛihya-sūtra,* the bride plays on various instruments, like *dundubhi* (drum) and *gomukha* (horn), for getting excellent children, especially for being blessed with charming daughters.

In the *Ṛig-Veda* itself, we find references to women's aptitude for dancing (1. 9. 2, 4).

Women during the Vedic Age were also good orators, and attended public and learned assemblies or places of popular enjoyment.

Even in the present age, the age of women's emancipation, military training is as yet denied to women. But in the *Ṛig-Veda,* we find mention of two women warriors, Vadhrimatī and Vishpalā, in the hymn of the female seer Ghoṣhā (10. 39. 40). Both of them took part in actual fighting in the battle-field. When Vadhrimatī had her hands cut off in battle, the two Ashwinikumāras, on her invocation, appeared there and gave her a pair of gold hands. Vishpalā was a soldier in the army of King Khela. When owing to enemy action her leg was severed, the Ashwinikumāras gave her a new leg and power of walking (cf. 1. 118. 8 ; 1. 112. 10).

The case of Mudgalānī, wife of Mudgala, also proves that during the Vedic Age, women were given full facilities for military training. She drove her husband's chariot in the battle, conquered his enemies and chased them out. We find another fighting Aryan woman in Shashīyasī (*Ṛig-Veda,* 5. 61. 6, 9).

The aboriginal Dāsas, too, seem to have had their womenfolk specially trained in warfare, and also to have possessed regular female armies. This is clear from a hymn where it is tauntingly said: "To the Dāsa, women are weapons. What harm can his feeble armies do to me?" (5. 30. 9). As recruitment of women to armies was a normal thing in those days, killing women in battle-fields was not considered unchivalrous. For example, we find Indra killing Danu, mother of Vṛitra, fighting by her son's side (*Ṛig-Veda,* 1. 32. 9). That women had full facilities for military training in ancient times is also proved by the term *shaktikī,* as mentioned by Patañjali (4. 1. 15. 6), meaning a woman spear-bearer.

In conclusion, mention may be made of the sixty-four arts to be mastered by women, as mentioned in Vātsyāyana's famous *Kāma-sūtra* (2nd century B.C.). These include unparalleled varieties of subjects, such as singing, playing, dancing, painting, making garlands, sewing, poetry-writing, tending trees, carpentry, physical training and military training. From this we can well conceive of the very liberal and extensive education afforded to ancient Indian women, who were expected to be well versed in so many subjects!

4. WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE EPIC AGE

(I) IN THE AGE OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

The high standard of women's education set up during the Vedic Age was fortunately continued to a large extent during the Epic Age as well. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata,* the immortal epics of India, are resplendent with the acts and achievements of a good many learned and qualified women. A very brief account is given here.

In the Ādi-kāṇḍa or first section of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* we find a beautiful verse depicting the gracious qualities of the women of Ayodhyā (Ch. 6). Befitting the reign of a worthy king, women too, were given full opportunities for education of various kinds. That women, too, like men, were entitled to *upanayana* or initiation and *brahmacharya* or Vedic studentship is proved by the right they enjoyed to take part in various Vedic rites and utter the holy Vedic *mantras.* Thus, unmarried girls, considered to be epitomes of purity and perfection, were chosen for the signal honour of welcoming

Rāma on his return to Ayodhyā from the forest, and giving him the purificatory bath first (6. 131. 38, 62).[6] Sītā is described as performing the *sandhyā* or offering daily Vedic prayers. That is why, when Hanūmat could not find her in Laṅkā after a long search, he decided to wait for her on the banks of a river where she was sure to turn up for offering her daily Vedic prayers (5. 14. 50-1). Kausalyā also is found to perform holy sacrifices. When Rāma went to take leave of her before going to the forest, he found her offering oblations to Fire along with the utterance of appropriate *mantras* (2. 20. 15). Tārā, the wife of Vāli, is another instance of a learned woman well versed in the Vedic lore. When Vāli went to fight with his brother Sugrīva, Tārā performed sacrifices to secure his victory (4. 16. 12). Thus, in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* instances are not rare of women performing sacrifices and uttering *mantras* even on their own right.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* we also find some instances of ascetic women engaged in the study, teaching and preaching of the highest Truth. For example, Shramaṇī Shabarī, the disciple of Mataṅga, with her hermitage on Lake Pampā, is described as wearing barks and matted locks, having reached the highest point of ascetic perfection, and being honoured by great ascetics (3. 74. 10, 32).

The *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts women as enjoying a high social position as well. The wife, as usual, is regarded as the very prop of family life, and the mother an object of supreme honour. In the Kiṣhkindhā-kāṇḍa, for example, it is said that the wife is the very self of a man (24. 38). In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, the mother is enjoined to be honoured as much as the father.

In the political sphere also, women were granted equal rights. For example, when Sītā desired to accompany Rāma to the forest, the great and revered sage Vasiṣhṭha, the spiritual preceptor of the royal family, tried his best to dissuade her with the proposal that she should reign over the kingdom during the absence of her husband ; as the wife was the very self of the husband, it befitted Sītā to rule his kingdom in his place (2. 37. 23-4). This single example prominently shows the very high standard of scholarship and efficiency reached by women of those days and the political recognition of their equal rights with men, so that wise men and real well-wishers of the country like Vasiṣhṭha did not have a moment's hesitation to offer even the crown to a woman.

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[6] The references to the text are from the *Madras Law Journal* Press edition.

The above is sufficient to show that during the age of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* too, the women of India kept their colours flying in all spheres of learning and progress, and achieved notable success in them all.

(II) IN THE AGE OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

The *Mahābhārata* ("the great India"), rightly so called, is far larger in extent and contents than the *Rāmāyaṇa,* and naturally contains a far more elaborate account of the education and learning of women during the Epic Age. A very brief account of the same is given here.

As in the case of women in other ages, so here also the evidence regarding women's right to education and learning is rather indirect. That is, it is known from the cases of a large number of learned women that women of those ages were given full facilities for all kinds of education. As these learned women of the *Mahābhārata* will be dealt with in two separate articles, only a few cases are being referred to here.

As during the Vedic Age, so in the age of the *Mahābhārata* also, women's full right to *naiṣhṭhika brahmacharya* or a life of celibate asceticism is recognized. Hence we meet with some prominent women ascetics here. The most celebrated of these is perhaps Sulabhā, who, not finding a suitable husband, embraced a life of celibate studentship and roamed about alone from place to place in search of the highest Truth, until she reached the court of King Janaka in Mithilā, a great scholar versed in the highest lore leading to salvation. Even such a celebrated scholar was compelled to recognize Sulabhā's deep learning after a thorough examination, and was taught by her (12. 320).[7]

Shivā was another woman ascetic who studied all the Vedas and attained spiritual perfection (5. 109. 18-9).

The daughter of Shāṇḍilya also embraced a life of celibate studentship and achieved the maximum perfection in asceticism (9. 54. 6-8).

Not only those women who voluntarily chose a life of celibacy, but also some of those who entered the family life were versed in the knowledge of Brahman or the highest philosophical lore. In the *Hari-vaṁsha,* a learned woman, wife of Prabhāsa, is described as a *brahmavādinī,* an expounder of Brahman, attaining the highest perfection in yoga and embracing the life of a wandering mendicant.

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[7] The references to the text are from the Bombay edition.

Gautamī was also a knower of Brahman, which enabled her to give a learned discourse on the state after death, even when her only son died of snake-bite (13. 1).

Another famous woman scholar was Arundhatī, wife of the great sage Vasiṣhṭha, who was equal to her husband in scholarship and versed in all subjects. She was an *āchāryā* or teacher on her own right, and took a special care to teach only those who were really desirous of knowledge (13. 130. 2).

In the age of the *Mahābhārata,* women also were permitted to enter the *vānaprastha āshrama* or repair to the forest for a life of austerity and meditation. For example, after the death of King Pāṇḍu, his grand-mother Satyavatī, with her two daughters-in-law, repaired to a forest for practising austerities and died there (1. 128. 12-3). After Kṛiṣhṇa's demise, too, Satyabhāmā and his other queens went to a forest and practised severe penances (16. 7. 74).

From the above, it is clear that during the age of the *Mahābhārata* also, women were entitled to *brahmavidyā* or the philosophy of Brahman, and as such to *upanayana* or initiation and *brahmacharya* or Vedic studentship.

In the *Mahābhārata* period, there were women versed not only in the highest philosophy but also in other branches of knowledge. Among the women members of the royal family, many were well grounded in politics and at the same time deeply religious in nature. Gāndhārī, wife of the blind king Dhṛitarāṣhṭra, was perhaps the most celebrated woman in the Epic Age. Her immortal saying, *"Yato dharmastato jayaḥ"* (Victory pertains only to the side of right), when she refused to wish success even to her own son Duryodhana, has passed into a classic. She is described as very learned, intelligent, versed in religious practices, etc. (15. 28. 5). We find Gāndhārī engaged in a learned political discussion with her son in the open court (5. 129).

Other royal ladies, like Kuntī and Draupadī, also supply very good instances of the incomparable strength of character, versatility and scholarship of women of ancient India. Draupadī is often characterized as a scholar and versed in religious lore (12. 14. 4). Vidurā, inspiring her defeated son to exert himself and conquer his enemies, stands out as a unique example of the unshakable courage and determination of Indian women (5. 129). Her fiery words will ever rank amongst the greatest heroic utterances of women.

Instances are found in the *Mahābhārata* from which we can gather that women of those days were taught such arts as dancing, singing and instrumental music. For example, Uttarā, daughter of King Virāṭa, and her companions were taught these arts at home (3. 232). Mādhavī, daughter of King Yayāti, was also an expert in music (4. 11. 12-3).

It has been shown above that in ancient times, teaching was residential not only for men but also for women. In the *Mahābhārata*, though no direct evidence is available, it is evident that some specially gifted women, like Sulabhā, did study in the homes of their spiritual preceptors. Others, of course, were taught at home, as proved in the case of Draupadī and Uttarā. Those whose fathers were teachers were naturally taught at home by them.

From the above brief account, it is clear that in the age of the *Mahābhārata* also, due attention was paid to the education of women, as a result of which many women of those days were able to reach the highest level of academic perfection. They also enjoyed equal rights with men in all spheres—domestic and social. In the *Mahābhārata,* the wife is spoken of as the best friend of a man (1. 74. 41), and women in general as objects of great veneration, symbols of supreme auspiciousness, virtue incarnate, lights of the family, beauty and wealth of the home, and objects of special care and attention (5. 38. 11). The verse from the *Manu-smṛiti* (3. 56) quoted at the beginning of this article is almost a reproduction of *Mahābhārata* (13. 45. 5-6).

Such was the glorious position of women during the great Epic Age.

5. WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE JAINA AND BUDDHIST PERIODS

During the Jaina and Buddhist periods no less, the women of India achieved marvellous success in the sphere of education and culture. In common with men, women also were admitted into monasteries and given full facilities for the highest kind of education.

Thus the Jaina and Buddhist systems of education, famed throughout the world for their broadness and depth, were universal in their nature, being applicable to all alike, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. These spiritually trained women not only reached a high degree of academic education but also undertook to preach their faith of universal love and brotherhood and dedicated themselves to social service.

Mahāvīra, the last and most celebrated of the twenty-four Jaina *tīrthaṅkaras* (saints), was very liberal in his outlook and never hesitated to admit women to the Order. He organized his followers into four categories—monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. Jainism, however, came to be divided into two main sects, Digambaras and Shwetāmbaras. The former do not believe that women are capable of attaining salvation (*mokṣha*), and so they do not admit women into the Order. But the Shwetāmbara sect, being much more liberal, makes no distinction between the sexes and freely admits aspirants of both into the Order. As a matter of fact, far more women than men, viz. thirty-six thousand women as against fourteen thousand men, renounced the world and became nuns. At their head was Chandanā, a first cousin of Mahāvīra, or, according to another account, his aunt. These Jaina nuns, including rich and respectable ladies, even queens like Paumāvaī were held in great reverence, and often designated as 'noble ladies'. Thus Jainas were specially progressive in opening new channels of religious education to women, even at such an early age.

In the case of the Buddhist Order, it is true that the deputation of women led by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the aunt of Buddha, was thrice refused permission by him to enter the Order, and that it was only after a very strong plea by Ānanda, his favourite disciple, that women were finally admitted to the Order. But there is nothing to show that Buddha himself was really reluctant to afford women equal opportunities with men in this respect, or had doubts regarding their capacities. In the famous canonical work,[8] it is beautifully said:

> "And be it woman, be it man, for whom
> Such chariot doth wait, by that same car
> Into Nibbāna's presence shall they come."

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[8] *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, part I, p. 45.

Thus, during the Jaina and Buddhist periods, women got full facilities for developing their spiritual potentialities.

Only a brief reference to that monument of women's spiritual and literary achievements, the *Therī-gāthā* (Songs of the Nuns) will suffice to prove the very high standard of learning reached by the women of those days. This is really a remarkable volume of psalms, consisting of more than five hundred stanzas, and attributed to seventy-one Buddhist *therīs* or Sisters (omitting the authors of the two poems ascribed to the followers of Paṭāchārā collectively). The theme is practically the same, viz. glorification of the Buddhist ideals of renunciation and perfection—nirvana. Some of these nuns might have renounced the world because of unhappy home life, family bereavements, poverty and so on. But cases are not wanting of nuns embracing the Order, not in a negative spirit of escapism, but out of an inborn aversion to the sensuous life and hankering for a spiritual one. For example, Dhammā, though married to a suitable husband, desires to renounce the world, but not getting his consent, enters the Order after his death (verse 17) ; Anopomā, rich, beautiful and widely courted, yet decides to embrace a life of celibacy (verses 155 ff.) ; Guttā (verses 163 ff.) and Rohiṇī (verses 271 ff.), were rich and qualified, but each refuses a royal suitor, herself becomes a Buddhist and persuades her parents to be so (verses 288 ff.), and so on.

Many of these *therīs* earned the reputation of being great teachers, preachers and social workers. Among them, perhaps the greatest preacher was Dhammadinnā,[9] who was regarded as the leading woman preacher (*dhammakathikā*) of those days. Once questioned by her former husband Visakha, she instructed him on various tenets and was highly praised by Buddha himself for her teachings. Sukkā[10] was another famous woman orator and teacher who used to teach the Buddhist doctrine to large gatherings in a very sweet and simple way. Another celebrated woman preacher was Paṭāchārā (*Therī-gāthā*, 112 ff.), herself well versed in the *Vinaya*, who brought to the Order as many as five hundred women, grief-stricken at the death of their sons, and showed them the way to salvation. She also converted another group of thirty women by her soul-stirring preachings. Khemā, wife of King Bimbisāra, was another Buddhist nun to become a celebrated teacher. She and Uppalavaṇṇā were praised by Buddha himself as models for nuns.[11] It is said that when Khemā, who earned the reputation of being a great orator, gave a long discourse to King Pasenadi on Buddha's existence or non-existence after death, her teachings entirely tallied with those of Buddha himself on the subject.[12] Thullanandā also delighted the king by her inspiring addresses and was presented his own cloak by him. In the *Vinaya-piṭaka* (Vol. 4) she is thrice referred to as a great teacher of the *Dhamma* (*paṭṭhā*) and twice as a famous reciter (*bhāṇakā*). The same epithets are applied to Bhaddā Kapilānī in the same passage. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings* (Vol. 5, p. 37) says that Kajaṅgalā, without ever hearing Buddha or his disciples preach, explained Buddha's utterances to laymen in such a manner as to gain high praise from the Master. Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakeshā,[13] who, after renouncing the world, wandered all over the country in search of knowledge and approached learned men wherever available, was such an expert debater that she was defeated only by Sāriputta.

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[9] *Paramattha-dīpanī* (Commentary on *Therī-gāthā*), pp. 15-20 ; *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. 1, p. 21.

[10] *Paramattha-dīpanī* (Commentary on *Therī-gāthā*), pp. 57-61 ; *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, part 1, pp. 273-4.

Examples are also not wanting of women engaged in learned debates and discourses with the Enlightened One himself. For example, we find Princess Sumanā and Princess Chaṇḍī discoursing to Buddha on the topics of giving alms and keeping the five *shīlas* (modes of good conduct), respectively.

These few cases will suffice to show the very high standard of intellectual and spiritual progress attained by Indian women during the Buddhist period.

6. WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF EARLY SMṚITIS

Unfortunately, through many causes, social and political, into which we need not enter here, women's position in society began to deteriorate during the Smṛiti Age, and they came to be barred from Vedic education. But even during this dark age, education of women never entirely ceased. This is clear from the honoured place given to women, specially to mothers, in the Smṛiti society. We have already seen, how the *Manu-smṛiti,* the most celebrated and perhaps the most ancient of all the Smṛiti-Saṁhitās, pays a great tribute to women. In another oft-quoted beautiful verse, it says that one *āchārya* (spiritual teacher) excels ten *upādhyāyas* (salaried sectional teachers) in glory; the father excels a hundred *āchāryas* in glory; but the mother excels a thousand fathers in glory (2. 145-6). In the *Atri-smṛiti* (14), another ancient Smṛiti, too, the mother is stated to be the greatest guru or object of veneration on earth. This Smṛiti also shows a remarkable sense of justice and fair play in dealing with cases of abducted women, and recommend that as women, being pure by nature, can never be polluted by external circumstances beyond their control, they are never to be discarded or excommunicated. (*Atri-smṛiti,* 188 ff.). The ancient and celebrated Smṛitis of Yājñavalkya and Parāshara also emphasize the inherent purity of women in a like manner. (*Yājñavalkya-smṛiti,* 71; *Parāshara-smṛiti,* 24-5).

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[11] *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, I. 14. 4, Vol. 1, p. 21.
[12] *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, 44. 10. 1, part 4, pp. 265-9.
[13] *Paramattha-dīpanī* (Commentary on *Therī-gāthā*), pp. 99-108.

Though no direct evidence is available from the above Smṛitis regarding women's education in those days, yet from the honourable position of women in society, it may be inferred that some kind of home education was not denied to them.

In fact, after explaining the *saṁskāras* (ceremonies), from *jātakarma* (natal rites) to *upanayana* (initiation), Manu winds up by saying that all these ceremonies are to be performed in their entirety also in the case of women, but without *mantras* (sacred texts), marriage being the only ceremony that has to be performed with Vedic *mantras* in the case of women (*Manu-smṛiti,* 2. 66-7). Thus, although the formal ceremony of *upanayana* was discontinued at the time of Manu, women were entitled to education in some other form, whatever be the actual practice in vogue.

7. Conclusion

From the brief outline given above, we get indeed a very bright picture of the position of women in the Vedic Age and the rights and facilities enjoyed by them then. It is true that this glorious position gradually deteriorated in course of time, opening the door to a flood of social evils, wholly unauthorized by our own scriptures and law-books, such as denial of education to women, child marriage, denial of proprietary rights to women, widow-burning, and so on. But, as already pointed out, even during the dark Middle Ages of foreign conquest and social anarchy, the torch of learning was kept burning by Indian women, and whatever happened to deprive them of their legitimate birthrights, did so more through conventional prejudice than through actual injunctions. For it is the sacred books themselves that say: *"Kanyāpyevaṁ pālanīyā shikṣhaṇīyātiyatnataḥ"* —a girl, too, should be brought up and educated with as much care as a son (*Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, 8. 47). Is it not Rājashekhara, the great poet, dramatist and rhetorician, who declares unhesitatingly in his celebrated work *Kāvya-mīmāṁsā*: *"Puruṣhavat yoṣhito'pi kavībhaveyuḥ, saṁskāro hyātmani samavaiti, na straiṇam pauruṣhaṁ vā vibhāgam apekṣhate. Shrūyante dṛishyante cha rājaputryo mahāmātya-duhitaro gaṇikāḥ kautuki-bhāryāshcha shāstra-prahata-buddhayaḥ kavayashcha"* (p. 53)—Like men, women too, can be poets. For potentiality inheres in the self, irrespective of sex differences. It is heard as also seen that princesses, daughters of ministers, courtesans and concubines are possessed of an extensive knowledge of the scriptures and also are poets.

Thus the zenith of education and learning, reached by India at the very dawn of human civilization—which, however, by no means marks the dawn of her culture, but rather the meridian—has been maintained, in some form or other, all through the ages. The *Mahābhārata* (13. 11. 14) declares in a simple way:

> *"Nityam nivasate lakṣhmīḥ kanyakāsu pratiṣhṭhitā"*

—In the person of a girl, resides ever steadily fortune as well as grace.

The immortal poet Kālidāsa sings out joyfully:

> *"Kanyeyam kula-jīvitam"* (*Kumāra-sambhava*, 6. 63)

—The girl is the very life of the family.

The heart of India has always accepted this, whatever be her outer, easily misrepresented, occasional dealings.

CHAPTER V

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

1. Social Changes

In order to give a proper estimate of the position of women in modern India, it is necessary to take into account not only the achievements and their effects as are to be observed at the present day but also the age-long story of the hopes and aspirations as well as the endeavours and frustrations which have culminated in the present position—a story whose end is yet untold. In the previous chapters of this volume such an attempt has been made.

The task is rendered difficult by the warring ideals that India's conquest and subjugation by less spiritually advanced nations has let loose on a people whose best traditions have subordinated the welfare of this worldly life to the ultimate goal of spiritual salvation.

A heritage of the noblest philosophies of the world, however, was not able to protect them, owing to the failure of its adherents to understand and practise it properly in their lives, in recent times from the pangs of hunger and degradation, on such a nation-wide scale as has never been experienced before by a civilized people. It is not surprising, therefore, that Indian women, with their emaciated children and frustrated partners, should sometimes have looked towards the Western world for a better way of existence, having lost faith in their own ancient ideals of patience, submission and devotion.

The women of our country have usually identified their religion with the very act of living, and sublimated their simplest household duties almost into sacramental rites. Now that the old sense of security has vanished, as the result of war, famine, communal strife, economic causes, partition and change of governmental principles, they find themselves in a world to whose standard of values they have to reorientate themselves. Hence the confusion, hence the fall from grace, which our present thinkers deplore. Yet it must always be remembered that the innate character of a whole nation does not easily change. Underneath this poor façade, something of the old marble beauty still lurks. The ruthless search for earthly happiness, the meaningless worship of comfort, the desire to dominate over all others and to violate all that stands in one's way in order to seize and to possess—these have overwhelmed the societies and governments of the West, but they are alien to our very nature, and though this quality of passivity has earned for us the opprobrium of slothfulness and cowardice, it has also left open for our daughters the gateway to peace.

In our proverbially slow-moving motherland, as everywhere else in the world, times have changed. Our mothers were not faced with such utter financial disaster; they may not have been wealthy, but they enjoyed a security and protection not to be dreamed of in this age of uncertainty and unrest. Their sheltered life is a thing of the past; the financial crisis of this generation is of such gigantic proportions as to require the utmost resources of both men and women.

Accordingly the whole face of society has undergone a corresponding change. The segregation of women has disappeared except in extremely orthodox and well-to-do families. The advent of independence was heralded, not by the blowing of conch-shells, but by the crying of starving children, deprived of all shelter and sustenance in the course of the twofold exodus following the partition of India into the Indian Union and Pakistan. Hunger knows no shame. The delicate ladies of many proud households have been obliged to walk for miles in the dust and public gaze for the sake of a handful of rice for their children. The old order could not withstand the strain; and strife and famine accomplished in ten years what would otherwise not have been effected in fifty, namely, the emancipation of our women.

It must not be forgotten that these calamities occurred chiefly in northern India, where women were comparatively constricted. The change, however, is perceptible everywhere now. The *purdah* had never found many supporters in south India, where the Muslim empire had little or no influence. In the north too, some movement in the proper direction had already commenced after the first World War. The passing of the Sardā Act in 1929 prevented girls from being married before the age of fourteen. As a result, girls' schools became more popular, and the number of girls studying in colleges increased to some extent.

No amount of legislation, however, can improve the status of women, unless the women themselves grow conscious of their own dignity and the responsibilities attendant thereon. As late as in 1904 Sister Niveditā wrote in her *Web of Indian Life* that once their kitchen duties were over, the ladies of the household had nothing to do save gossip and pray. Our very misfortunes have become our benefactors. Even the more well-to-do women of India have now recognized the dignity of work. The Indian Union has thrown open the doors of all educational institutions, services and lines of employment for competent women. We have women doctors, lawyers, engineers, statesmen, office administrators, secretaries, clerks, musicians and artists, and had even a woman Governor of an important province, who might be mentioned among the wisest and most honoured administrators in our country. Many women go abroad every year for professional and technical training.

These praiseworthy instances, however, are more the exception than the rule. The overwhelming majority of Indian women are as far removed from the decorated zenana dolls of the Western imagination, or the sophisticated career women mentioned here, as possible. In Bengal and the Punjab, hundreds of thousands of women refugees and displaced persons as well as wives and widows of respectable middle-class families, with the scantiest of education at their command and the most spotless reputation behind them, find themselves obliged to marshal all their resources in order to earn a few rupees as untrained canteen worker, needle woman, domestic help, factory hand or miserable seller of every imaginable article. This degradation of middle-class economy is a million times worse than the poverty of the labouring classes, whose women have always been accustomed to work in the field, factory and mine, and have no past dignities to regret and no present position to maintain.

Such is the condition of the women of the middle classes at the present day. Even one generation ago such a woman would not have been called upon to plunge into this struggle for existence, but would have led the quiet, patient, pious life of the Hindu housewife, venerating her husband's parents, worshipping the *tulasī* (holy basil) plant, attending to her husband's needs and cherishing her children. She would probably have been unlettered or just able to read and write, and if unusually clever, to keep her household accounts as well.

but she would have been familiar with the scriptures, submissive to the dictates of Providence, a ministering angel in the house and very helpless outside. She would have been obedient and conservative and would rather have died than become a wage-earner. She would have remembered her prayers morning and evening.

This new emancipation born of necessity does not stand on sufficiently firm ground. Most of these women are semi-illiterate wage-earners, forced to work by circumstances, but always regretting the past days of plenty and ever ready to return to the old comfortable dependence, into which they would no longer fit as snugly as before, having once tasted the sweet fruit of independence and the pleasure of handling money, however meagre, of their own earning. There can never be total emancipation for women so long as they depend wholly on men for their very livelihood, the care of a home and the drudgery it entails having always been omitted by universal male consent from the list of services for which wages should be paid.

The only way, therefore, to ensure any permanent liberty for women is to give them a wider and more practical education, such as will enable them to fight for their own rights, shoulder their own burdens and support themselves, if need be. At present there is no arrangement for free primary education even for men in India.

Next let us consider the legal position of the modern Indian woman in relation to her financial and educational problems. Almost all Hindu women of middle-class families are married, for the sake of their future provision, if for nothing else. Yet how little security the law really gives them, if the worst comes to the worst! Though nominally the wife is the head of the household along with her husband, he has the right to marry again, should he so desire. She cannot claim any compensation except her maintenance, and that only on the condition that she lives in her husband's house, where the new wife is installed. Her husband is the legal guardian of her children and the owner of all the family possessions, except the money, jewels, clothes and furniture which comprise her *strīdhana* (private property). He may abandon her, should the occasion arise, but she may never divorce him, however grave the provocation, except by chicanery of which she would normally never dream. Actually she generally wins her husband's respect, love and fidelity, handles the household expenses and acts as his chief adviser, but there are very few legal remedies for her, should matters be otherwise. Undoubtedly in these hard days even one wife and one family are often more than a man can maintain, and polygamy is almost unheard of; but laws were really made to protect the unfortunate and control the law-breaker, and therein the Hindu marriage laws fail.

India is not a single country, but a sub-continent of many races and many languages. There is little outward similarity between the striding trouser-clad Punjabi woman and the retiring Bengalee draped in her modest *shāḍī* (cloth). The fair and blue-eyed Kāshmīrī has little in common with the dark-skinned Tāmils of the south. Neither their treasured jewels nor their daily diet reveal any resemblance. But far stronger than these trivial dissimilarities are the old Sanskritic ideals which bind them together and make them venerate the same qualities of renunciation, compassion and devotion, ancient ideals of service and dedication inspired in the age of Vedic simplicity and forcefulness and handed down from mother to daughter through countless generations.

It is true that there are a few matriarchal communities in south India and among the hill tribes in the north, but their number is insignificant. The overwhelming majority of Indian women have accepted wifehood and motherhood as their natural role, and therein lies their greatest weakness as well as their most glorious strength.

2. ATTITUDE TOWARDS MARRIAGE

For the foolish and utterly ignorant marriage is indeed a denial of self-expression, but for the wise and the educated it is the noblest career that the world has to offer. A good marriage gives such opportunities of fulfilment and service as may never be found elsewhere. To this day the normal Indian woman accepts marriage as her natural destiny, not in perpetual tutelage, as has heretofore been often quoted, a tutelage that commenced under her father, continues under her husband and will end under her son, but as a proper partner, not in rivalry with her husband over personal rights, but bound in service with him for the welfare of the family and the nation.

To the Western judgement this betokens a slave mentality, but Indian women look upon it otherwise. Indeed, it is an anomaly that in continents where women have fought for their freedom and rights through generations, there should be such feverish competition among almost all adult and even adolescent women in order to secure a husband at any cost. A glance at the advertisement pages of any popular Western magazine strengthens the idea that the sole aim of dressmakers, chemists and cosmetic manufacturers is so to disguise a plain girl as will enable her to catch a man's eye with matrimony as her final goal. The Indian attitude appears more natural, dignified and simpler in every way. To the Indian girl even now marriage is neither frustration nor self-satisfaction, but a self-dedication. An Indian woman, to this day, does not marry her husband alone but adopts his whole family and identifies her own happiness with their well-being. She is bound by ties of duty not only to her husband but also to his parents, brothers, sisters and even nieces and nephews. This imposes a discipline over her emotions and desires, no less rigorous than that of any school. To her eyes the Western idea of family life, which excludes and resents a widowed mother's, an invalid father's or a ruined brother's claims, appears mean and selfish in the extreme. The modern Indian woman is no slave to her family, but the dispenser of its welfare. She will gladly cook, sew, nurse and teach not only for her husband and children but also for those of his relations who may need her services. This is not frustration, but the true fulfilment of her womanhood.

Frustration occurs when she finds no scope for her abilities. Once more the question of women's education arises. As has already been mentioned, because of the terrible poverty of the whole country, due to reasons mainly political and economic in issue, a large section of the women of the middle classes has been called upon by necessity to contribute to the family exchequer. Their training having heretofore been in the nature of free household service, they find themselves totally unfit for wage-earning. Every social worker in modern India is familiar with the heart-breaking futility of adult women with intelligence and eagerness, for whom no employment may be found, and for whose education and training there are few or no facilities.

3. Part of Education

There is only one solution to the problem. Every single girl or woman, before the responsibilities of marriage are thrust upon her, should be trained to earn her own livelihood according to her station in life, regardless of inconveniences and public opinion. Indeed, under present circumstances public opinion will support the idea, and it is private opinion alone with which one will have to contend.

To go deeper into the question, the lives of Indian girls are conditioned by certain prejudices. Nowadays, in all the towns, everyone who can possibly afford it sends his daughters to school. An unlettered woman is to be found only among the very poor, the very orthodox and the labouring classes. Middle-class people can no longer afford to keep their daughters under cover. They walk to school, often in groups, servants being a luxury. They take the public conveyances ; some hire the services of the school bus, which is somewhat expensive ; a few of the richer girls go in private cars. Their course of studies is almost the same as that of their brothers, though recently there is a talk of the need for a separate curriculum for girls. Their clothes are perhaps a little more costly, their wanderings much more controlled. In villages, very often there are no girls' schools beyond the primary stage; sometimes one hears of co-education under strict surveillance, but as a rule the parents begin to look for a husband for their daughter as soon as she is fourteen, though the marriage does not generally take place till she is about seventeen.

The dowry system still prevails. Inter-caste marriages are still very unpopular. This state of affairs will probably continue till the young men and women of India begin to choose their own partners, but this again presupposes a certain degree of educational qualifications on both sides. Moreover, the number of unhappy marriages and infidelities and divorces among many advanced Western nations in spite of their more intelligent attitude towards marriage has provided food for serious thought.

The truth remains that Indian women must seek their fulfilment in their own way, the Indian way. Though a certain section of educated society still blindly imitates Western ways of thought and action and fashion, the more thoughtful have realized that if one has anything to contribute to the world, it must be conceived in one's own soul and be no external appendage. The Indian woman must imbibe all the learning of the world, but be truly Indian in her thought, speech and action. She must discard all superstition, put aside all prudery and affectation and despise all imitation and flattery. She must cherish her heritage of the acquisition of knowledge and humility, be brave yet gentle, independent and eager to serve. In her dress and manner she must proclaim to the world that she represents the best that India can contribute. To be of her own country, and yet to assimilate the wisdom of the world—that is her only way to fulfilment.

It is generally supposed that in middle-class Indian families the problem of providing her marriage expenses is so acute as to render a girl-child unwelcome to her own parents. One must understand that lack of affection for the daughter is not the reason for this attitude, but anxiety for her future. Once again, with the growing popularity of education, it must of necessity soon be realized that the educated unmarried daughter may be an asset to the family and not a liability. Indeed, in many advanced families such a woman has often proved to be a source of comfort to her parents in their old age.

Careers: In the present economic situation it is not only the unmarried woman who has to earn her livelihood, but a large number of married women as well, because their husbands' incomes are no longer adequate to the needs of their family. We sometimes hear of husband and wife both practising as doctors; married teachers, too, are fairly common. One also comes across married nurses, though nursing as a profession has long been considered unworthy of women from respectable families. It is only recently, with the reorganization of the nursing federation and the higher educational qualifications now insisted upon, that nursing as a profession is slowly winning the dignity it undoubtedly deserves as one of the noblest occupations women may undertake. Most hospitals train nurses, who are sent up for state examinations, and for whose encouragement stipends and generous scholarships are awarded for higher studies in this country and abroad.

4. REORIENTATION

The whole of Indian society is relaxing gradually. The orthodox restrictions on food and eating habits are slowly growing out of fashion. Women who study or go out to work must perforce adopt more liberal habits, often to the consternation of the older generation. This does not mean that Indian women are growing away from the old ideals that once made them famous in history. What one eats and what one wears are trivial matters, which should always be adapted to circumstances. For many centuries too much importance was given to such things. Swāmī Vivekānanda deplored that our religion should appear to have taken refuge in our kitchen utensils. If our present tragic penury has restored our sense of proportion even in this single direction, it has helped the cause of Indian women to a great extent.

Our Indian-ness does not lie in our food or in our dress, but in a deeper outlook which underlies all our thoughts and actions—an outlook embodying qualities of sincerity, simplicity and kindness. If in our frantic search for a solution to our present problems we lose these eternal qualities, then indeed we are unfortunate—we whose traditions survived centuries of domination by foreigners holding alien faiths. From them even in our utmost extremity our women learnt valuable lessons of strength and forbearance, and because of them our own ideals grew dearer to our hearts.

The life of the young Indian unmarried girl has hitherto been fairly simple, consisting of a little study and a little housework, a little innocent visiting and a few cinema shows, with hardly any changes of fashion from year to year, and hardly any cosmetics or artificial aids to beauty except a little powder and perfume, *surmā* for the eyes and lac for the feet. They have never had boy-friends or adolescent problems ; indeed, they have been married before such questions arose. But with the rise in the age for marriage, the spread of education and the inevitable urge for new experiences, the freer movement of girls, the growing popularity of cheap beauty aids and the attractiveness of modern entertainment, the old simplicity can no longer endure. It is not unnatural or wrong for the modern young girl to desire some of these things. The danger lies in the lack of a proper sense of proportion. These are superficial pleasures, and though indulged in, should never be permitted to turn our daughters' minds away from the serious purpose of life.

True independence does not consist in such tinsel properties, but in the willingness to take the good with the bad, the duty with the comforts, in just proportions. To be truly modern is to have a purpose in life, to be able to say, "For this I have lived, to this purpose I have dedicated my life." Otherwise the old dependence with its simplicity, sincerity and industry would be far better than a day-to-day round of meaningless pleasures, conventional parties and purposeless conversations.

To be modern is not to be artificial. In our country simplicity has always been the key-note of social intercourse. Our ideas of good manners have always been based on kindness and consideration for other people's convenience, and not dictated by a book of etiquette. If we now lose this old simplicity, then we are poor indeed. Our young educated married women no longer experience the same exhilaration from a dip in the Ganges that their grandmothers did ; neither have they discovered any suitable substitute for the sentiment. This is their greatest weakness—this mental poverty, this renunciation of the old faiths without the installation of any new ideals, this slothfulness and purposelessness. This is where the Western nations have a lesson for us, however out of sympathy we may be with them. They set for themselves an object in life, and turn all their endeavours towards furthering that object. Our aims and ideals are near at hand, and we have only to dedicate ourselves to their service. This will be the proper test of modern Indian womanhood, whether in the reorganization of their country they take upon themselves their proper woman's share—to build, to moderate, to protect and strengthen—or whether they lay waste their energies merely crying for the rights which men have denied them.

There are many gifted women in India—writers, artists, musicians, philosophers, politicians, scientists and social workers—who can hold their own against all competitors. All over the country there are women magistrates in juvenile courts, women officers in rescue homes and women jail visitors. The women of India are not unwilling to shoulder the burden of their own misfortunes. In every public calamity the women are the greatest sufferers.

To this day most middle-class families are unwilling to accept daughters and daughters-in-law whom they have failed to protect. This is done on the plea of morality based on ancient precedent dating back to the Epic Age. It has been said that the proof of the worthiness of every society lies in the manner in which it treats its women, and on whether moral responsibility is shared by men and women equally.

Rescue homes are not the answer to the problem. It is for the women of modern India to establish a practical morality so that in future no innocent woman will ever be victimized doubly. Selfishness, intolerance, treachery and cruelty are even more immoral, but are seldom penalized by any society in the world. Such is the vanity of human endeavour!

The women of England fought for the right to vote, but the women of India have been presented with the same right without any effort on their part. Easily won privileges always run the risk of being taken for granted. A complacent spirit is the deadliest enemy to progress of any kind. In the past there have been queens and princesses in this country who, in the absence of their husbands and fathers and as regents for their sons, have ruled wisely and well. These heroic women have had their counterparts in modern India too, but on the average the Indian woman has had little or nothing to do with the government of the country, and has taken little interest in governmental affairs, except in so far as they affected the family circumstances in the shape of rents and taxes. A great British thinker once said that the Eastern nations were so easy to conquer because they did not care who collected the taxes. This alleged preoccupation with transcendental things, however, is now more or less a forgotten state. For many decades India has grown politically self-conscious. This has reacted on women as well, at first as mere repeaters of their husbands' doctrines, but of recent years more actively. There have been women political agitators, women *détenus* and women martyrs. Now the average woman must sacrifice all the privileges she enjoyed as the weaker sex, and take her full share of responsibilities.

The Indian woman, however, is not militant. Violence and destruction are repugnant to her. War is regarded with horror. But her attitude is by no means that of the defeatist. Indeed, it is because Indian women are softly stubborn that any social reform moves so slowly in this country. Forty years ago many mothers told their daughters that educated women became widows, or at least lost their character. Even now old grandmothers looking askance at education are not rare. But once a mental awakening commences, no power on earth can hold it back. All the women's colleges in India are now full to capacity, and there is demand for more. This awakening must be in our own way, uprooting the unworthy and cherishing the good.

The goddess Durgā is pictured with ten weapons in her ten hands, not to destroy and molest, but to subdue the enemies of peace and prosperity. That is the true Indian way. By such means the salvation of the women of India must be secured.

The Indian way does not mean stagnation. Indeed, the Indian woman has shown remarkable ability to adapt herself to new circumstances. In India, fortunately, fashions do not show many fundamental changes from year to year. On the other hand, the Indian woman who no longer spends her life in the shelter of the ladies' quarters, now dresses more suitably for her work and studies, which take her outside her home. The *chādar* or cotton or silk shawl which covered her from head to foot is gone. In its place she has adopted Westernized undergarments and a blouse with sleeves. The *shāḍī* remains, but is generally worn so as to allow movement. She wears sandals or shoes, and does not always cover her head.

In spite of these changes she generally retains a great deal of her old simple dignity and modesty. The Western habits of smoking and dancing have not yet grown popular with Indian women, except among those who move in ultra-fashionable circles. These in moderation are not perhaps wrong in themselves, but are as yet alien to the Indian sense of good taste. Fortunately, however, the old betel-chewing habits, so harmful for the teeth, are growing rarer among educated women.

There is still much to be desired. The Indian woman does not take sufficient interest in physical exercise, though a good beginning has been made in girls' schools and women's sports clubs. It is true that most women have neither the time nor the opportunity to indulge in games, but they recognize the value of sports in building good health.

Many women now often gladly perform for themselves all those outside chores, such as marketing and fetching the rations, for which they had always depended on men. Unescorted ladies are often seen in the cities and villages ; many undertake long railway journeys by themselves, if necessary. The women of India are not so helpless as they are supposed to be.

It is a contradiction that in a country whose stores of learning, philosophic, scientific and literary, are unparalleled in the world's history, the women should be considered among the more uncultured people of the earth. We have already given our considered opinion that the education of women is the only remedy in such a case. We have also noted that the present financial crisis has to some extent accelerated the spread of education, by rendering it imperative that women of the poorer and middle-class households should contribute to the family income. There is also the question of the legal position of these women not merely as the wives of their husbands but as individuals. This aspect is in accordance with their dignity as human beings. An independent adult life for some women is now more common than forty years ago, but the Hindu woman who has brothers has hardly any rights to possess property on her own behalf.

Since 1937 the position of the widow in India has improved so much that she can enjoy a life interest in a share of her husband's property equal to that of a son's. The position of the widow who has lost her husband during the lifetime of her father-in-law has also improved. The question of the moment is whether the daughters, married and unmarried, should have a share in their father's property. The claims of the unmarried daughter are the stronger, inasmuch as she has no husband's means to fall back upon. Many people feel that the unmarried daughter should enjoy a smaller share than her brothers, since she has no family to support, until such time as she secures a husband, or until her death, should she remain unmarried. In Muslim and Christian families in India, all the daughters have certain rights of inheritance. In most countries of the world, however, the daughters have hardly any claims on the parental property except such settlements and dowries as are given to them at the time of their marriage. The problem, therefore, is a common one all over the world, but it assumes such magnified proportions in this country, because here the daughters are rarely trained to earn their living. The spread of education will alleviate their distress, but not solve the point of law. Equity urges that the unmarried daughter should be entitled to a share of her father's property, even if the married daughter's claims are laid aside, because anyway her husband will inherit part of his father's property. The question still remains to be settled.

There is also the problem of divorce. Though the Indian mind is averse to easy divorce, there is no doubt that there should be legal ways of dissolving a marriage, should married life become impossible, through disease, immorality and so on. The grounds for divorce should be serious in order to prevent thoughtless dissolution of the marriage tie and evasion of responsibilities. At present only registered marriages are entitled to divorce, and that on the only ground of infidelity together with cruelty. Hindu marriages are like sacraments, and as such are not generally registered.

There is also the feeling that both polygamy, however rare, and polyandry should be declared illegal. Polyandry is almost unknown in the country owing to practical reasons, and it is also not permitted by Hindu or any other law.

The question of inter-caste marriage also arises, with the growing custom of educated young men and women choosing their own spouses. Act III of 1873 and the later Gour Act attempt to meet the situation, but a large number of serious thinkers are of opinion that inter-caste marriages should ordinarily be recognized by Hindu law without involving such a civil registration.

That mere legal rights are not enough to ensure progress of any kind is illustrated by the fact that though the great Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyāsāgar proved a century ago that the remarriage of Hindu widows was authorized by the Hindu scriptures, to this day young widows are seldom remarried. Even childless widows of tender age are often trained to think that their usefulness is over. Clothed in a borderless white cloth, living on a vegetarian diet, withdrawn from all auspicious functions and deprived of the chance to learn a profession and make a career for themselves, even in more prosperous days, these young women have been a total loss to the community. Their sole usefulness was as unpaid drudges in their fathers' or father-in-laws' households. The rigorous discipline to which they were subjected has now relaxed to a great extent. The age-limit for marriage now prevents children under fourteen from becoming widows. Many middle-class families send their young widows to various widows' homes for training, mostly industrial. But their number is infinitesimal compared with the hundreds of thousands of widows whose abilities are never given a chance to develop. In this respect too, the present financial crisis is acting somewhat like a boon, by making it impossible for many families to take on the additional responsibility of an unattached widow. Society, therefore, is obliged to consider their condition, which is always the first step towards reform.

They need not all be remarried, because marriage is not the sole career for women, but they may be taught to lead industrious and useful lives, in the service of their country and countrymen. Here again a proper education is the only solution.

5. Conclusion

Dignity of Life: As our survey of the position of women in modern India draws to a close, we realize all the more that to ensure a permanent and true emancipation of women, one must recognize the dignity of human life. Mental slavery is more difficult to remedy than political slavery, which at the worst is an external appendage. Women must grow conscious of their own deserts and usefulness. A married life, where the wife enjoys the respect of her husband and authority over her household, holds as much dignity as the most esteemed of careers, because it gives her the opportunity to create, preserve and protect the costliest possessions of her country, namely, the children of the nation.

But it is also true that each and every woman is not intended for an ordinary married existence. Women with a mission in life should be given the opportunity to develop their particular abilities in their own way, and thus dedicate their lives to the service of humanity.

The most ruinous disease of the present sophisticated generations of the world is that they have forgotten to respect life and, instead of loving its goodness, despise its weaknesses. The outcome of such a mental attitude is its uninspired art and literature and its total lack of faith in the purpose of all life. India, which has scaled the heights of glory, and plumbed the depths of misery, must not let her woman plunge into this pitfall of hopelessness. Those who are waking from sleep expect the daylight, not the darkness. So let it be in India.

The Apotheosis of the Mother: In our country the servitors of a household address the mistress of the house as mother. The total stranger addresses every woman as mother. The deities of learning and prosperity are represented in the images of beautiful women, as motherhood incarnate. It has been said that the Hindu grows old, not when his hair turns grey, but when he loses his mother. Before going on a journey and on returning, most Hindus touch the feet of their mothers. This apotheosis of motherhood is not the cult of a physical fact, but the idealization of the sublimest qualities of motherhood, of selfless devotion, unquestioning love and complete self-abnegation. The physical phenomenon of bearing children is the least part of it. From a woman worthy of being called mother, the Indian tradition expects perfect purity, loyalty and unselfishness. These qualities have a beauty of their own, and the Indian mother very often cares for no other aid to beauty.

In this world every noble institution carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. So it has been with our Indian mothers. Their carelessness about their appearance, their indifference to their own health and their indulgent tenderness for their children have grown to be the greatest handicaps to the successful rearing of their children. Indian mothers must realize that it is as much their duty to care for whatever good looks, abilities and health they have been endowed with by Providence, as it is to care for the children they have borne.

Clumsy mothers rear clumsy children, sick mothers rear unhealthy children and over-indulgent mothers weak children. To consider others and to be able to do without things are lessons to be learnt in childhood ; this our mothers must not forget. The hardest lesson of all for a mother is to teach her own children to do without her ministrations, to stand on their own feet, make their own mistakes and bear the consequences. Those who rear men and women for the service of mankind must themselves have a core of firmness. More than tenderness, more selflessness is to be demanded of our Indian mothers.

Christ enjoins us not to lay up treasures on earth, where the worm and rust will get them and thieves may break in, but in heaven. In our country we have neglected too long some of our earthly duties. It is right that every man and woman should demand the opportunity to live with dignity worthy of a human being. Knowledge, self-control, habits of industry, faith in one's own principles, ideals of service and forgiveness of others—these are the highest objects of life, but there are other qualities which we must also cultivate—cleanliness, punctuality, adaptability and openness of mind.

The women of India believe in the future. Too much has already been said of the consolations of an after-life. Let us seek fulfilment in this life too, but in the true Indian way, not solely in indulgence and enjoyment whose surfeit results in a sense of frustration, but in performing those duties which fall to our share, and accepting with gratitude and humility those good things the earth offers us. And remembering that though we cannot eradicate all the evils of the world, we can always mitigate the sufferings of those at hand, and by never compromising with falsehood and cruelty, let us perpetuate our own highest ideals of womanhood.

CHAPTER VI

GREAT WOMEN IN VEDIC LITERATURE

1. Introduction

Of great women in Vedic literature our information is unfortunately scanty and uncertain. Although some women appear to have been heroic enough to take part in big fights, they have had no place in political life ; the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā* (4. 7. 4) expressly says that men go to the assembly, and not women. In the time of the Upanishads we have evidence that some women shared in the intellectual interests of the day, as is exemplified by Yājñavalkya's two wives, one of whom was interested in his philosophical discussion, the other not. As scholars or teachers some other women are mentioned, such as Gārgī, who tried to embarrass even the great Yājñavalkya by her searching questions. But these instances probably form exceptions rather than the rule; for from the time of the Brāhmaṇas we find distinct traces of the lowering of the position of women. No doubt, the wife was a regular participator in the sacrificial offerings of her husband ; but her right of independently offering oblation appears to have been restricted in later times. She was given an honoured place indeed as mistress in her husband's home, but she was still subservient to his will ; and in the *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1. 9. 2. 12; 10. 5. 2. 9) we have a reference to the rule that the wife should take her food, not with but after the husband. Although the *Kātyāyana Shrauta-sūtra* (1. 1. 7) remarks that the Shruti 'does not discriminate between man and woman,' this *Brāhmaṇa* (4. 4. 2. 13) declares that 'women own neither themselves nor an inheritance.' The marriage tie was indeed not lightly regarded, but polygamy was freely allowed, and the obligation of chastity was laid on the weaker sex alone. All this makes it doubtful whether the decidedly high ideal of family life, evinced by the implied equality of Patnī (wife) as the counterpart of Pati (husband), was always actually fulfilled ; but there is evidence to show that the women's own sphere continued to be the home, where her authority was seldom disputed (*Taitt. Saṁ.* 6. 2. 1. 1; *Shat. Br.* 5. 2. 1. 10).

But in the time of the *Ṛig-Veda* women appear to have enjoyed greater freedom and equality. We hear of several women-seers whose hymns are said to have been preserved in this earliest record of Indo-Aryan culture. Ancient works on *Ṛig-Vedic* literature like the *Bṛihad-devatā* of Shaunaka and the several *Anukramaṇīs,* all of which must have been composed some time before the Christian era, record the tradition of their authorship, and ascribe to them sometimes single verses and sometimes groups of them running into whole hymns. The validity of the ascription has sometimes been doubted by modern scholars, with the suggestion that these hymns were later compositions based on traditional myths and legends; but nothing convincing has been adduced in support of this suggestion.

2. Women-Seers in the Ṛig-Veda

We have a list of twenty-seven women-seers, called *brahmavādinīs,* in the *Ṛig-Veda.* Of these some, like Aditi, Juhū, Indrāṇī, Saramā, Urvashī, Rātrī and Sūryā, can be counted as divine or semi-divine beings of a mythological character; while some, like Shrī, Medhā, Dakṣhiṇā and Shraddhā, are obvious personifications of abstract ideas. Leaving them aside, we have only nine or ten *brahmavādinīs* who can be regarded as real human beings responsible for the verses assigned to them. They are Vishwavārā, Apālā, Ghoṣhā, Godhā, wife of Vasukra, sister of Agastya, Lopāmudrā, Shashwatī and Romashā. To this should be added the name of Vāch, but it has been doubted whether she was a real woman-seer. The term *brahmavādinī* in this connection need not be taken in a deeper philosophical sense. The verses themselves show that the women-seers do not claim any higher knowledge of Brahman as it was understood in later times, but they only praise the various deities they worship and speak only of their own joys and sorrows of life. The term Brahman, therefore, should be taken here properly in the earlier Vedic sense of prayer or devotion.

Vāch: The most remarkable hymn ascribed to Vāch, which occurs in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛig-Veda* (10. 125), is known today as the *Devī-sūkta.* It is employed in the autumnal worship of the (goddess) *Devī,* for the Shākta worshippers of the goddess take this *Ṛig-Vedic* composition as the basis of their devotion. But the account given in the subsidiary Vedic literature is different. There the hymn is said to have been uttered by Vāch, daughter of the sage Ambhṛiṇa (Vāgāmbhṛiṇī). But since the woman-seer in this hymn conceives, in a pantheistic mood, her unity with the universe as the source and regulating spirit of all things, it has been presumed that the name Vāch (Word) is merely metaphorical, and that there never existed any real woman-seer of that name. Hence it became possible, in later times, to identify the seer Vāch with Vāch Saraswatī, the goddess of speech, or with the abstract Shabda-Brahman (Logos), or even with Shakti as the principle of primeval Energy, and to elaborate on this basis various mystical interpretations of the hymn. But the older evidence of Vedic literature itself goes against this presumption, and very clearly regards this hymn to be the composition of a particular woman-seer, whose lofty inspiration has, thus, given it a high place in the history of Indian thought. In her impassioned utterance she tells us:

I walk with the Rudras and the Vasus,
I, with the Ādityas and all the gods;
I bear up the two, Mitra and Varuṇa,
I, Indra and Agni, I, the two Ashwins.

I sustain the pressed-out *soma,*
I, Twaṣhṭṛi, Pūṣhan and Bhaga;
I give wealth to him that brings oblation,
To the worshipper devout, and him that presses *soma.*

I am the queen, the bestower of riches,
I was the first to know among the holy ones;
Me, the gods put in many places,
Making me enter and dwell abundantly.

By me, whoever eats food, and whoever sees,
Whoever breathes, and whoever hears what is said,
They dwell in me, though they know it not;
Listen, O wise, to thee I say what is true.

Verily I myself speak all this,
What is welcome to the gods and men;
Whoever I love I make strong,
I make him a Brahmā, a sage and a seer.

I spread out the bow of Rudra for him
To slay the unbeliever with his arrow;
I make strife among the people;
I pervade all the earth and heaven.

I give birth to the father on the head of all this;
My source is in the midst of waters in the sea;
Thence I spread through all the worlds,
And touch this heaven with my eminence.

It is I who blow as the wind blows,
Taking hold of all the worlds;
Past heaven and past this earth
I have by greatness become such.

The mystical exaltation expressed in this hymn, which feels identity of self with the entire universe, is somewhat strange in the predominantly practical and polytheistic age of the *Ṛig-Veda*; but it is not altogether unexpected, having been expressed in various ways in other hymns, especially in the Hiraṇyagarbha-Purusha hymns of a pantheistic character. To seek unity in the midst of diversity is a natural trend of human thought; but here it is not any systematic philosophical thinking but essentially emotional realization of what is transcendental that gives a distinctive significance to this powerful hymn. By characterizing this utterance as 'The Word Speaketh' a foreign scholar has rightly emphasized its importance as an instance of divine inspiration acknowledged in most religious systems; and from this point of view it is clear that a wider or universal interpretation is not impossible. It is no wonder, therefore, that this hymn was made the basis of Shakti-worship in later times. The author, whoever she was, was undoubtedy one of the great women of the Vedic Age.

Vishwavārā: In the composition of the other nine women-seers we have no trace of such high thought or feeling. Nevertheless, these great women give unrestrained expression to the intimate joys and sorrows of their homely life; and the hymns, however scanty, are of importance, not only as showing the high position occupied by them in *Ṛig-Vedic* times, but also as giving a glimpse into the inner heart of the woman. Of these, the hymn of six verses assigned to Vishwavārā of the Atri family occurs in the fifth, the family book of the Atris. Apparently a married woman, she approaches the blazing sacrificial Fire at dawn, with her face towards the east, offers oblations to the gods and prays for love and happiness in wedded life. We translate here the first three verses:

The fully kindled Fire, bright against the firmament,
Facing the dawn, shines far and wide;
Vishwavārā proceeds towards the east with obeisance,
Praising the gods, with oblation and ladle full of butter.

Fully kindled, O Fire, you are the lord of immortality;
You follow and bring welfare to him who offers oblations;
The worshipper whom you approach brings all his wealth,
And, O Fire, he spreads his hospitality before you.

Repress our foes, O Fire, to ensure our great good fortune;
Let the riches brought by you be of the highest excellence;
Make the wedded life fully restrained.
Overpower the strength of those who are hostile to us.

From this devotional hymn it is clear that Vishwavārā not only composed the hymn, but herself performed the sacrifice in her own right. This right appears to have been withdrawn in the age of the Brāhmaṇas.

Apālā: In the hymn (8. 91) assigned to Apālā, we have a strange mixture of myth and reality. Although married like Vishwavārā, Apālā, also of the Atri family, was less fortunate. Afflicted with a skin disease, which would not allow hair to grow on her body, she was discarded by her husband. How she met and worshipped Indra in a curious way and became freed from the disease is the subject-matter of her hymn, which occurs, not in the family book of the Atris, but in the eighth book of the *Ṛig-Veda.* Knowing that the *soma*-juice was Indra's favourite drink, Apālā, going out to fetch water, picked up a *soma* plant on her way, and began to crush it between her teeth for extracting the juice for Indra. As Indra heard the sound, he thought it proceeded from *soma*-pressing stones. He hastened there, and drank the *soma* from Apālā's lips. He gave her three boons, which made her father's bald head, his barren field and her hairless limb to grow abundantly. Then passing Apālā three times through the aperture of the car, the cart and the yoke, Indra made her fair-skinned and freed from disease. From the intimacy thus indicated, the *Bṛihad-devatā* gives the legend as an instance of a god falling in love with an earthly maiden. The incident is thus described in the hymn with the praise of Indra:

A maiden, going to fetch water,
 found a *soma* plant in the path;
Returning homeward she spoke:
 'For Indra I press you, for Shakra I press you'.

You who go from house to house,
 a hero shining in your glory,
Come and drink this *soma* pressed by my teeth,
 along with fried grains, and cakes and chants of praise.

We would know you, Indra, but we know you not;
O drops of *soma,* flow for Indra slowly, yet more slowly.

Many times may Indra make us strong,
Many times may Indra give us wealth;
Many times wandering with husband's hatred,
May we now be united with Indra.

O Indra, make these three places grow abundantly,
My father's head and his field and my limb;

Make fertile this field of ours which is barren,
Make my limb and my father's head full of hair.

Three times did you purify Apālā
Through the hole of the chariot, the cart and the yoke.
And you made her, O Indra Shatakratu,
Have a skin resplendent like the sun.

Ghoṣhā: Of all the women-seers Ghoṣhā made the largest contribution, two entire hymns of the tenth book (*Ṛig-Veda,* 39-40), each containing fourteen verses assigned to her. She belonged to a family of great seers; her grandfather was Dīrghatamas and her father Kakṣhīvat, both of whom were composers of several hymns in praise of the Ashwins. But high-born as she was, she could not find a husband because she had white leprosy, and grew old in the house of her father. It is said that invoked by her two hymns, the Ashwins, worshipped by her forefathers, cured her of the disease and made her worthy of wedded happiness. The next hymn (10. 41) is said to have been composed by her son Suhastya. Of the two hymns composed by Ghoṣhā, the first refers to the various great deeds of the Ashwins in helping and curing the blind, the diseased and the feeble; the second is more personal and expresses Ghoṣhā's more intimate feelings and desires. The hymn is too long to be fully translated here, but we give the verses in which there is a joyful anticipation of the bliss of married life:

The woman has been born; let him, desirous of maiden,
approach her;
For him let the spreading creepers grow along with rain;
Let the streams flow for him as if down on an incline;
For him who is not to be conquered, let there be the rights
of a husband.

The men who weep for their life, who give them a place
in the sacrifice,
Who hold them long locked in ardent embrace;
Who beget the wished-for child for the sake of the Fathers,
To such husbands the wives bring happiness by their embrace.

We know not that happiness of theirs; explain well to us
How it is that young men tarry in the house of young girls;

This is our desire, O Ashwins, that we repair
To the house of the husband, who is devoted, strong and manly.

O Ashwins, rich in food, may your good will come down to us;
May you control the desire in our hearts;
O Twin Associates, be our protectors and lords of welfare;
May we, being loved, reach the house of the husband.

On the house of my man, O Ashwins, bestow wealth
And a son to me, who always sing your praise;
Make the fords well watered, O lords of waters,
Remove on the way all evil hindrance that stands.

Other Women-Seers: To the remaining six women-seers, not whole hymns but a few stanzas only are assigned. The first five and a half of the sixth verse of hymn 134 of the tenth book are said to have been composed by Māndhātṛi in praise of Indra; but the remaining half of the sixth and the seventh verse are ascribed to Godhā. There is, however, nothing remarkable in these verses except a eulogy of Indra and the Vishwe-devas. Similarly, the anonymous wife of Vasukra is credited with the first stanza of a hymn (10. 28) in praise of Indra, while her husband is the seer of a part of this and the immediately preceding hymn (10. 27), the ascription going back to the time of the *Ṛig-Vedic* Āraṇyakas (*Aitareya,* 1. 2. 2; *Shāṅkhāyana,* 1. 3). The sister of Agastya, whose name is not known, contributes a single stanza to a hymn (10. 60. 6), the rest of which is assigned to her sons, the Gaupāyanas. In this verse she makes a heroic call upon King Asamāti of the Ikṣhwāku family to come to the aid of her sons who, as domestic priests, were dismissed by him, but one of whom was killed by the crafty priests appointed in their place (*Bṛihad-devatā,* 7. 84-102):

O king, yoke the red horses to your chariot for the
nephews of Agastya;
And overcome all the niggardly Paṇis who do
not offer worship.

It is noteworthy in this connection that references are not wanting to warlike or sport-loving women in the *Ṛig-Veda.* We have a mention (1. 116. 15) of Vishpalā, who in Khela's (her husband's?) battle had a leg severed like the pinion of a wild bird; but the Ashwins as divine physicians replaced it with an iron limb. In another obscure hymn (10. 102), Mudgala is said to have won a fight (or a chariot-race?) with the aid of his wife Mudgalānī as the charioteer. But none of these women is the seer of any hymn.

Of a somewhat different kind are the few verses of which Lopāmudrā, Shashwatī and Romashā are the reputed authors. They are remarkable for their plain-speaking in giving spontaneous expression to the innate urge of a wife for the embrace of her husband, of which she had been deprived. Agastya's wife Lopāmudrā is the seer of two stanzas in a hymn (1. 179. 1-2), "dedicated to love," in which we have a strange dialogue on this topic between the great ascetic and his wife. Tired of her husband's practice of austerity and continence, the wife who had served him long and faithfully feels herself neglected, and makes an impassioned appeal for his love and company:

> For many long years in the past, both by day and by night,
> And in the mornings, have I wearied myself serving you;
> Now decay impairs the beauty of my limbs;
> What then?—Let husbands approach their wives.
>
> The ancient sages who attained truth,
> And talked of truth with the very gods,
> They did beget children, but did not break their penance;
> Therefore, should the wives be approached by their husbands.

From the last stanza of the hymn it appears that Lopāmudrā's appeal did not go in vain; and Agastya discharged the duties of both his domestic and ascetic life without neglecting the one for the other. In the same way, Shashwatī, who is called Nārī or woman *par excellence*, expresses her joy in a phallic verse (1. 179. 6) on finding her husband Asaṅga Plāyogi recover his lost manhood. Romashā, mentioned in the *Bṛihad-devatā* as the wife of King Bhāvayavya, expresses in one verse (1. 126. 7) her youthful gladness on the attainment of puberty, and challenges her husband to feel her closely, since she is no longer immature. It is remarkable that these frank and honest expressions of womanly passion have not been rejected, but have been given a place in the sacred text.

3. WOMEN-SEERS IN THE UPANIṢHAD

Maitreyī: There is no trace of any great woman in the desert of desolate theological speculation of the extensive Brāhmaṇa literature. But coming to the Upanishads, we find at least two women of outstanding personality who could engage even the great Yājñavalkya in high philosophical discussion. The one was his wife Maitreyī, and the other, his disputant Gārgī, daughter of the sage Vachaknu. Unfortunately we do not know much about them except what is given incidentally in the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad*; but from the little we have it is clear that they were keen seekers after truth. The sage Yājñavalkya, the greatest teacher of the age, is about to renounce the world, and wishes to make a settlement of his worldly goods between his two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. On learning this Maitreyī says: "Sir, if this whole earth, full of wealth, be mine, should I be immortal by it?" "No," replies Yājñavalkya, "like the life of rich people will be thy life; but there is no hope of immortality by wealth." Then Maitreyī says: "What should I do with that which would not make me immortal? Tell me, sir, of that alone which you know (of immortality)." Yājñavalkya, very pleased, replies: "You have been truly dear to me, and you speak dear words. Come, take your seat; I will explain it to you. As I explain, meditate on it." Yājñavalkya then imparts to Maitreyī the knowledge of Brahman as a means to immortality, which, fully recorded, forms the highest teaching of the Upaniṣhad.

Gārgī: Gārgī appears to have been a more accomplished scholar, who questions Yājñavalkya at great length upon the origin of all existence, until the great sage, perturbed by her questionings, exclaims: "Ask not too much, Gārgī, so that thy head may not fall off thy body. Truly, concerning divinity one must not ask too much. Thou dost ask too much, Gārgī; ask not too much." Thus silenced, she was, however, not subdued. Again in an assembly of sages, she seeks permission to ask two questions of the famous teacher, adding: "Should he answer those, none of you can ever beat him in describing the Brahman." She then advances towards Yājñavalkya fearlessly with the words: "I ask you. As a hero's son from Banaras or from Videha strings the slackened bow and arises with two foe-piercing arrows in his hand, so I confront you with two questions. Answer me these." At the end of the highly philosophical dispute she acknowledges her defeat, and very generously declares to the assembled sages: "You should consider yourselves fortunate if you can get away from him with a salutation ; never shall any of you beat him in describing the Brahman."

CHAPTER VII

GREAT WOMEN IN THE RĀMĀYAṆA

1. Introduction

"Devoted to *tapas* (austerity) and *swādhyāya* (study of the Vedas)": It is with these auspicious and highly significant words that Vālmīki, himself an ascetic, begins his *Rāmāyaṇa*. These words form part of the description of the eminent sage Nārada, who paid a visit to him. Vālmīki opened the conversation by expressing his eagerness to know who, among his contemporaries, was considered the embodiment of all virtues. The list of qualities was indeed exhaustive, including valour, truthfulness, self-control, firm adherence to vows and a desire to secure the welfare of all creatures.[1] In reply Nārada gave him an account of Rāma. Some time later Brahmā appeared before Vālmīki and instructed him to compose the entire history of Rāma. "Even what is not known," assured the deity, "shall be duly unfolded to you."[2] Vālmīki, accordingly, "employed his yoga power and clearly saw before him Rāma, Lakṣhmaṇa and Sītā, together with Dasharatha and his wives, living in his kingdom, all laughing, talking and acting, bearing themselves exactly as in real life. And having truly seen everything by virtue of his contemplation, he set about recording the history of that fascinating personality, Rāma."[3]

The centre of attention in Vālmīki's composition is thus quite fittingly Rāma *the man*. Celestials, sages, women and other characters are so presented as to set off to advantage the greatness of this hero. Women appear in all possible relationships, as mothers, wives and daughters. Each is shown as passing through a different level of moral or emotional control. Some of them stand in direct relationship with Rāma. The majority, however are connected with, and therefore affected considerably by, the virtues and vices of others—kings, noblemen and even common people. Saintly women too are described, some remaining alone and some in the company of their virtuous associates. The total picture is so skilfully and artistically drawn that every virtue found in any one individual is shown to be already present in Sītā, while whatever defects may be found in other characters are made, by contrast, to enhance her surpassing glory.

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[1] *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*: *Madras Law Journal* Press edition, 1. 1. 2-4. The subsequent references are also to the same.

[2] 1. 2. 35.

[3] 1. 3. 3-7.

As an illustration of this contrast we may take the chain of anxious thoughts Hanūmat (Hanūmān) had on failing to see "the chaste Sītā." "Looking at Mandodarī, having the splendour of gold and adorned with diverse ornaments, sleeping apart, the very mistress of the inner apartments," he first thought within himself, "This one, endowed with the wealth of youth and beauty, might be Sītā."[4] The next moment, however, he decided that it could not be, for "separated from Rāma, Sītā is incapable of sleeping, eating or decorating herself or drinking. She is incapable of associating with any other person, even if he were the king of the celestials himself. This lady whom I see is some other."[5]

2. Two Main Types

Great women described by Vālmīki can be brought under two main types. One is represented by such saintly ladies as Anasūyā, who cast off all worldly ambitions and retired to the forest to lead a life of *tapas* or mental discipline. Shabarī and Swayaṁprabhā belong to this group of advanced souls. They are found staying practically alone, spreading the fragrance of their inner perfection for the benefit of those who get into their immediate neighbourhood. Ahalyā is described in greater detail. Her struggles, her fall and her further disciplines teach us a number of lessons.

The second type is represented by women who remained in society, led a family life and rose to eminence by faithfully discharging their proper duties. In this category come Mandodarī, Saramā and Trijaṭā, all residing in Laṅkā, Tārā residing in Kiṣhkindhā, the three queens of Dasharatha residing in Ayodhyā, and finally Sītā, who revealed her greatness wherever she was placed. When we call them great, what exactly do we mean? Do we mean that their lives were so pure, so free from human weaknesses and so richly endowed with subtle protective forces that no complicated situations could arise to upset them? Far from it; the greatness of most of them consisted rather in their capacity to face all trials and tribulations, armed with the strength that truth, sincerity, self-sacrifice and other virtues gave. As Lakṣhmaṇa reminded Rāma once, "The great remain unagitated in the midst of difficulties, just as mountains remain unshaken by the velocity of strong winds."[6] A study of the *Rāmāyaṇa* shows that in the case of almost every great woman, the initial stroke of calamity from outside or the surging up of greed from within did as a matter of fact produce the normal human reaction of feeling desperate or of trying intrigue. But as the first effects subsided, every lady regained her balance, very slowly in many cases, but steadily, until at last she reached the highest values of life that mankind can ever manifest under similar circumstances.

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[4] 5. 10. 50-3.

[5] 5. 11. 1-3.

3. The Forest Group

Anasūyā: *Tapas* and *swādhyāya* being the keys to eminence, as pointed out by Vālmīki himself in his opening verse, it is but fitting that our humble study of the great women, described in his poem, should commence by paying homage to the saintly lady, Anasūyā. She was very old at the time, and "her joints had become slackened, her skin wrinkled and her hair white. Her whole frame shook, like a plantain leaf in the wind."[7] Unique was the meeting of Sītā and Anasūyā. Both were equal in the depth of their devotion to their husbands. Atri's was a life of retirement and meditation, while Rāma's was predominantly one of administration of vast territories. This accounted for the major differences in the experiences and reactions of the two chaste ladies. Thus Anasūyā, following her lord, performed mighty austerities and dedicated their fruits to the benefit of others. Once, said Atri, people suffered much from the consequences of a drought extending over a decade. Anasūyā then "created fruits and roots and made the waters of the Gaṅgā flow through their very asylum."[8] Austerity and compassion were the key-notes of her character.

She began to discourse on wifely virtues, making Sītā an occasion for it. "By luck it is," said she, "that you, O Sītā, take

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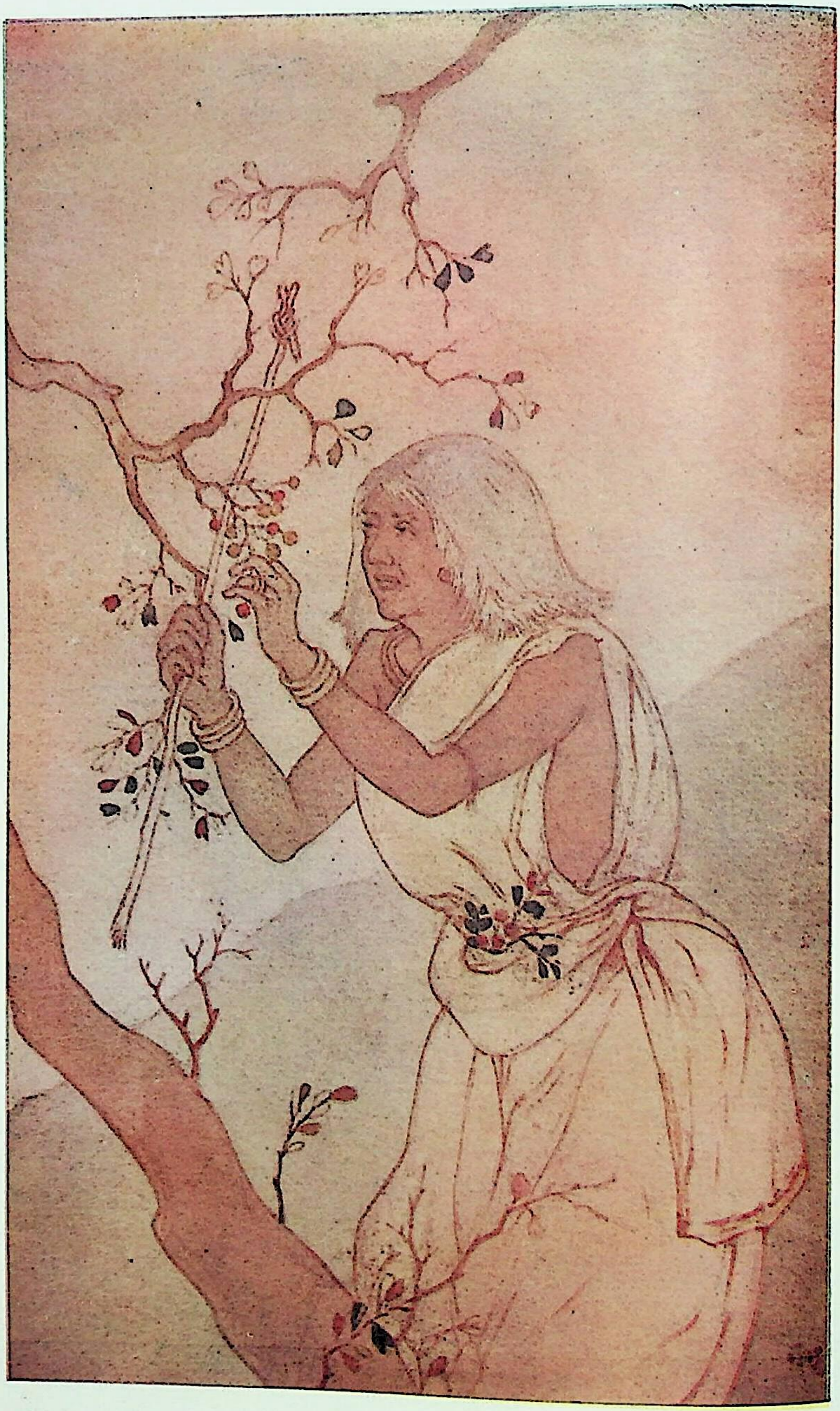
[6] 3. 67. 7-8.

[7] 2. 117. 17-8.

[8] 2. 117. 9-10.



SHABARĪ

Artist : Nandalal Bose

Courtesy : K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review) delight in righteousness. You have left your kindred and, banishing pride, followed your husband to the woods." By way of contrast she also describes how bad women "range at their will" and "reap infamy."[9]

There was no need to advise Sītā on these topics, since the virtues mentioned by Anasūyā were already established in her. Yet, as the words uttered by the saintly lady were charged with her love and blessings, Sītā honoured them and said with fitting humility, "I know that a woman's spiritual guide is her husband." These lessons were in the very air that Sītā breathed. "What my mother-in-law," said she, "instructed me at the time of my leaving for the forest is constantly in my mind. And what my mother also taught me in the presence of fire is very well remembered by me. Nor have I forgotten what my relatives said to me, viz. that the austerity of a woman consists in ministering to her husband." "Sāvitrī," she added, "having served her lord, is highly honoured in heaven, and you too, following the same course, have secured the same desirable end."[10]

Anasūyā was very much delighted, and she said, "By resorting to the energy of my austerity, I wish to confer a boon upon you." When Sītā politely avoided asking for any particular favour, inasmuch as "everything had been done" for her, Anasūyā said that she would satisfy her own personal desire by gifting an unfading garland, a few ornaments and some precious sandal paste. "Daubing your limbs with this excellent paint," she said, "you will make your husband happy, even as Lakṣhmī does Viṣhṇu."[11] Anasūyā then made Sītā narrate the thrilling story of how Rāma broke the bow and took her hand in marriage. As the narration ended, the day also ended. Anasūyā, with delicate poetic touches, described the sunset scene, with the birds settling down to sleep and the ascetics entering their asylums with their water-pitchers. She then asked Sītā to put on the gifted dress and ornaments and go into Rāma's presence to enhance his joy. "Witnessing the honour accorded to Sītā, Rāma and Lakṣhmaṇa were transported with delight."[12]

Shabarī: If Anasūyā represents perfection got through service centering round her husband, Shabarī represents perfection secured through unflinching devotion to spiritual guides. Her masters were well known as disciples of the eminent sage Mataṅga. Their austerity was so wonderfully creative that even drops of sweat falling from their bodies, as they collected wild fruits for their teacher, were said to have transformed themselves into unfading garlands![13] What then to speak of words that fell from their lips! They assured Shabarī, "Rāma will come to your asylum. Seeing him, you will go to that best of abodes whence none returns." From that day Shabarī waited eagerly for the arrival of Rāma, keeping various wild fruits for offering to him. So, as soon as he arrived, she rose up with folded hands and fell at his feet. In reply to Rāma's kind enquiries she said, "Favoured with your presence, my austerity has attained its consummation. My very birth has now become blessed, and my service to my spiritual masters fruitful. You are the foremost of the celestials. Worshipping you, I shall attain to the abode of the deities." She then offered him the fruits. Having thus fulfilled her desire of serving Rāma, the old lady, wearing matted locks, rags and the skin of an antelope, "entered the fire" with Rāma's glances falling on her.[14] "By virtue of her meditation, she repaired to that holy region where the pure-hearted sages, her preceptors, lived."

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[9] 2. 117. 21-6. [10] 2. 118. 2, 7-10. [11] 2. 118. 14-20. [12] 2. 119. 11-5.

Shabarī, the low-caste woman who attained illumination, affords a striking contrast to many characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Her main act of austerity consisting in serving her saintly teachers, she shines owing to her simplicity, devotion, unerring insight and self-mastery. Her life shows that illumination comes to the sincere aspirant, irrespective of ancestry, scholarship, sex or rituals.

Swayaṁprabhā: There was a saintly lady who did not come into direct contact with Rāma, but assisted his work by serving Hanūmat and his companions. When they all got fatigued, they entered into a vast cave in search of food and water. It was a magnificent cave, having golden trees, jewelled seats and elegant dwelling places. Going further inside, the monkeys met an old female ascetic, "wearing black deer-skin, and flaming in energy." Hanūmat asked her who she was and to whom the cave belonged.

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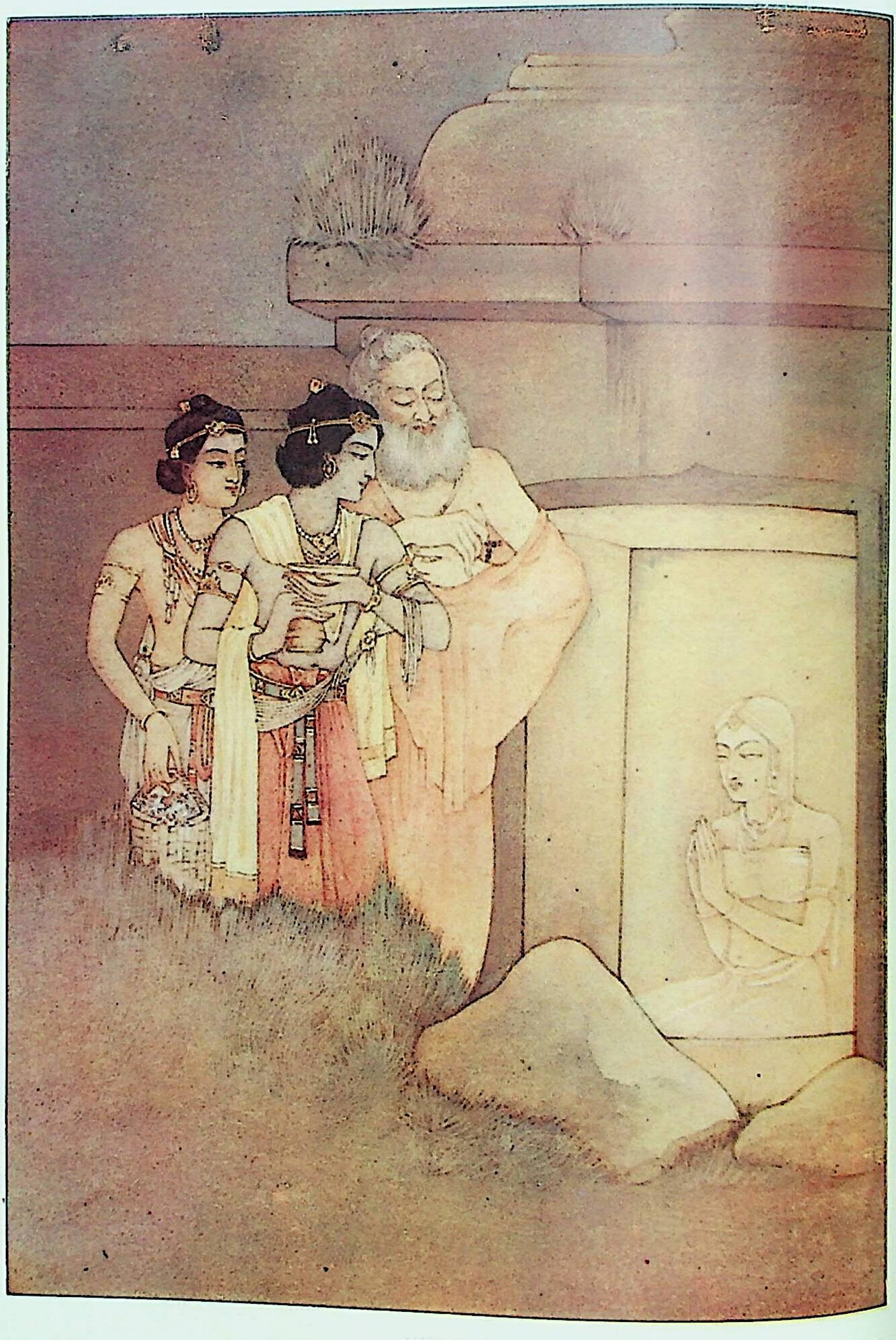
[13] 3. 73. 23-5.

[14] 3. 74. 31-3.



AHALYĀ

Artist: *Nandalal Bose*

Courtesy: *K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review)*

And referring to the beautiful things found there, he asked her, "Have these sprung from your power, or do they owe their existence to the ascetic energy of another?"[15]

Swayaṁprabhā, who was practising righteousness and was engaged in the welfare of all beings,[16] said in reply that the whole grove was constructed by Maya. He had obtained consummate mastery in his art through prolonged austerity and the blessings of the Creator. Maya, however, conceived a passion for the Apsaras Hemā. This irritated Indra, who "struck him down with his thunderbolt. Brahmā then conferred on Hemā this fine forest and the privilege of enjoying everything therein." As Hemā, skilled in dance and music, had gone somewhere, Swayaṁprabhā was remaining there as a guardian out of love for her friend![17]

Finding that the monkeys were tired and hungry, she first permitted them to eat and drink as they liked. Afterwards, when she heard their story and saw their eagerness to return to their work, she said, "It is hard for any one to go back alive from here. But by the potency of my austerity, acquired through self-discipline, I shall deliver you from this den. Close your eyes."[18] They obeyed and closed their eyes. Within a second she took them all near the sea, and wishing them good luck, went back to her abode.

What a glorious example of self-abnegation! Staying in the midst of plenty, and having the power to make nature obey her slightest wish, this saintly daughter of Merusāvarṇi lived on "frugal fare"[19] and guarded the abode of her friend. As occasions arose, she extended hospitality to others and even employed her yoga power to relieve those in distress. And all this she did with no ulterior purpose than the "welfare of all beings."

Ahalyā: We shall now turn to the fourth and last person of the forest group, namely, Ahalyā. Her story has to be approached with respect and reverence by all who sincerely struggle for self-mastery. For it shows that spiritual eminence is hardly achieved at one bound by anybody, but that it comes as the culmination of a series of victories over the lower impulses in oneself.

Hala means ugliness. As there was nothing blamable in her,

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[15] 4. 50. 39-41; 51. 8.
[16] 4. 51. 9-10.
[17] 4. 51. 17-8.
[18] 4. 53. 6-9.
[19] 4. 50. 40.

Brahmā himself gave her the name Ahalyā. Once, we are told, the deity left her in the care of the sage Gautama for a long time. The self-controlled Gautama looked after her carefully and gave her back, pure and unsullied. Highly pleased with this virtuous conduct, Brahmā gave her in marriage to Gautama himself.[20] Marriage did not alter their attitude towards discipline, for they continued their ascetic practices with the same intensity and rigour as before. There was, however, in Ahalyā's character a small trace of "perverse understanding" and curiosity[21] which, combined with her "matchless beauty," exposed her to temptation. And that temptation came through the treachery of Indra, who had imagined himself to be the proper husband for her, and therefore had become full of jealousy when she was married to Gautama. In the absence of the sage, Indra assumed his form and found no difficulty in seducing her, since, apparently, her austerity was not at that stage strong enough to triumph over the demands of the senses.

Advance in austerity makes speech creative, so that what the saint utters comes true.[22] An angry speech then becomes a curse, while a speech with goodwill behind it becomes a blessing. No person, however, is affected by any curse unless there is some serious defect in his or her character. In this instance, Gautama in righteous indignation cursed Indra as well as Ahalyā. To Ahalyā he said, "You are gifted with beauty and youth, but your mind is fickle. You shall not continue as the single beautiful damsel in the world."[23] "For a thousand years," he added, "you shall live here unseen, feeding on air, without food and tormented by repentance."[24] Gautama then, however, assured her saying, "When the irrepressible Rāma will come to this dense forest, you will be cleansed of your sin by giving him hospitality."[25]

At the sight of Rāma her curse ended. "Seeing the magnificent lady flaming in ascetic energy" both the princes took hold of her feet. But she, "remembering Gautama's words, took hold of theirs." The celestials then honoured Ahalyā, and with her person purified by austerity, she was taken back by her saintly husband.[26] When Vishwāmitra narrated this story in the court of Janaka, Shatānanda,

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[20] 7. 30. 24-9. [21] 1. 48. 19.
[22] *Amoghā asya vāg-bhavati*: *Yoga-sūtra*, 2. 36, commentary of Vyāsa.
[23] 7. 30. 39. [24] 1. 48. 29-30. [25] 7. 30. 42-6. [26] 1. 49. 21-3.

Ahalyā's son, with his hair standing on end, enquired again and again, "Did my famous and exalted mother . . . grown old in asceticism . . . entertain Rāma with the produce of the woods?" Vishwāmitra assured him that everything necessary was properly carried out and that Ahalyā had been accepted by Gautama, "as Reṇukā by Bhṛigu's son."[27]

4. THE LAṄKĀ GROUP

Saramā: Let us now turn to the study of eminent women in the Laṅkā group. As far as Sītā's life in Laṅkā was concerned, we knew that it was one of agony for her. But there were a few bright spots here and there ; and one such was her relationship with Saramā, the virtuous[28] wife of Vibhīṣhaṇa.

Before the battle began, Rāvaṇa showed Sītā the illusion of a head resembling Rāma's, looking as if newly severed from the trunk. Believing that her husband was really slain, she lamented piteously and fell into a swoon. Before Rāvaṇa could do anything further, he had to hurry to the council hall to discuss with his generals about the manner of destroying the enemy.

Rāvaṇa himself had deputed Saramā to be a companion to Sītā and to protect her. This "kind-hearted lady, firm in vows," now approached Sītā and said mildly:[29] "Renouncing all fear of Rāvaṇa, and remaining hidden, I managed to hear everything that he said as well as your reply to him."[30] She assured Sītā that Rāma was incapable of being surprised in sleep, and that what she saw was a mere illusion. "Your good day has dawned," she said, "and certainly Lakṣhmī seeks you. Rāma has already encamped himself on the southern shore of the sea.[31] And having come to know of this, Rāvaṇa is now consulting with all his counsellors." Saramā tried to convince Sītā that her lord "of controlled anger and inconceivable prowess" would soon slay Rāvaṇa and make her happy. Preluding her speech with a smile, Saramā now offered to go secretly to Rāma, using her power of traversing the sky, and communicate Sītā's message to him.[32] In this respect she went to the maximum in her discretion to "protect" Sītā. Sītā, however, politely refused to employ Saramā for such a purpose. The only service she required of Saramā was to ascertain, if possible, what Rāvaṇa intended to do—whether he wanted to detain her or return her to her husband. Saramā, accordingly, wiped Sītā's tears, went out, saw everything and made a faithful report. She said that although repeatedly advised by his mother and counsellors, Rāvaṇa did not intend to liberate her. "He cannot," she said, "yield you up in sheer fear; nor is he backward in battle." Yet, assured the sweetly-speaking Saramā, Rāma would soon kill Rāvaṇa and take her back to Ayodhyā.[33]

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[27] 1. 51. 3-5.
[28] 7. 12. 25.
[29] 6. 33. 1-3.
[30] 6. 33. 6-7.
[31] 6. 33. 15-6.
[32] 6. 34. 1-3.

Trijaṭā: Almost in the same way did another Rākṣhasī, Trijaṭā by name, comfort Sītā in her distress. According to Rāvaṇa's instructions, many Rākṣhasī guards threatened Sītā in order to make her give up Rāma and marry their master. In keeping with their own low mentality, they urged her not to waste her youth, but thankfully accept silk dress, ornaments and sandal paste offered by Rāvaṇa and sport with him, with a thousand females waiting upon her![34] But when she spurned these proposals with indignation, they did the only other thing possible for them, namely threaten to tear her limb by limb and banquet on her flesh![35]

Seeing that this was going too far, the "aged and wise Trijaṭā" asked them to stop and listen to the details of a terrible dream she had seen. "I saw Rāma," said she, "wearing garlands and clothed in white, ride in a celestial chariot, along with Lakṣhmaṇa . . . Sītā too was clad in white . . . She met Rāma at last, like light joined to the sun . . . Rāma, having truth for his prowess, along with Lakṣhmaṇa and Sītā, went with speed to the northern regions . . . I saw Rāvaṇa too, shaved, besmeared with oil, drinking honey . . . quickly going on a chariot to the south." After giving some more significant details, Trijaṭā said to the Rākṣhasīs, who had become frightened by this time: "No more rough words! Console the lady and implore her forgiveness. Surely, through Rāma mighty disaster will overtake the Rākṣhasas. If Sītā be pleased with you, you might be saved from ruin when it comes." Trijaṭā, who had keen insight into the nature of things, explained also how certain signs, like the throbbing of the left side of Sītā or the delightful singing of the birds, indicated the success of Rāma and the ruin of the Rākṣhasas.

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[33] 6. 34. 25-7.

[34] 5. 24. 34-8.

[35] 6. 34. 39-47.

Her wise words had their effect. The guards became less threatening for the time, and Sītā, partly soothed, said, "If this be true, I shall save you all."[36]

After Rāma and Lakṣhmaṇa were struck down and bound with networks of arrows by Indrajit, Rāvaṇa caused Sītā to be taken in the aerial car Puṣhpaka, so that she could have a clear view of the fallen heroes. Rāvaṇa thought that "seeing no other course," Sītā would now of herself seek him. But the moment she saw the brothers stretched on the ground, bathed in blood, she burst into bitter lamentation. Trijaṭā then cheered her up by various arguments. She argued from the facial expression of the soldiers, and even from the behaviour of the Puṣhpaka, that the two princes were really alive. "This I tell you from affection," she said, "I never told you untruths before, nor will I tell you now. These are only lying insensible with arrows. Grace has not taken leave of them yet." Sītā fervently said, "Be it so!"[37]

While conferring immortality upon Vibhīṣhaṇa, Brahmā had made a beautiful comment. He had said: "In spite of your birth in the Rākṣhasa race, your thoughts do not originate in sin."[38] In fact they were all centred in righteousness. So it was in the case of Saramā and Trijaṭā.

Mandodarī: Among those whom Rāvaṇa's vicious habits threw into a severe conflict of duties, the greatest sufferer was certainly his chief queen, the chaste and virtuous Mandodarī. When she came of age, Maya, her father, became eager to select a proper husband for her. "Being a father to a daughter," said he, "is really a misery to every one that seeks honour."[39] In the course of his search, he met Rāvaṇa, and without delay the marriage was celebrated. Maya knew that there was some kind of a curse even regarding Rāvaṇa's birth. Yet he gave away his daughter, "having respect for the race of Rāvaṇa's paternal grandfather."[40] Maya had with him a wonderful dart, acquired by means of the most rigid austerities. This he gave as a marriage present to Rāvaṇa, and it was with this that Lakṣhmaṇa was wounded in the encounter.

Mandodarī appears in two important scenes, and the total impression created is that of a calm and majestic lady, a real queen among women, whom Hanūmat,—not without justification,—easily mistook for Sītā. Her whole-hearted devotion to Rāvaṇa could be looked at from two sides. One was her own inner worth, her spontaneous offering of loyal service to her partner in life. The second was the grandeur of Rāvaṇa's personality, which commanded the love and admiration, not merely of Mandodarī but of the numerous ladies who adorned his inner apartments. Indeed, his very opponents, Hanūmat and Rāma, were impressed by his forceful personality. "Ah!" exclaimed Hanūmat in genuine appreciation, "the form, the patience, the strength, the splendour and the auspiciousness of the Rākṣhasa king!" And he added, "If he were not highly impious, he could very well have become the protector of the celestials!"[41] Rāma too had a similar experience on seeing him "glowing in splendour" in the battle-field. "He shines in glory," exclaimed Rāma, "and is incapable of being looked at, like the noonday sun!"[42]

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[36] 6. 27. whole chapter. She actually saved them. 6. 116. 30-41.
[37] 6. 48. 31-4. [38] 7. 10. 35. [39] 8. 12. 11. [40] 8. 12. 20-1.

Mandodarī's importance went down a little only after Rāvaṇa's eyes fell on Sītā. "Seeing you of golden hue," said he to Sītā, "I do not relish my own wives. I have brought many a beautiful damsel from various quarters. You shall become my foremost queen amongst them!"[43] Mandodarī knew how Rāvaṇa's mind was working, but she did not feel jealous of Sītā. It was only after Rāvaṇa's death that she compared herself with Sītā. Said she while lamenting bitterly: "There are in your inner apartments ladies far more beautiful than Sītā, but you did not perceive them, being blinded by lust. Sītā is not my equal or superior, either in birth, beauty or accomplishments, but this too you did not perceive. Death does not visit men without any cause, and Sītā is the cause of your death."[44] Her virtuous life made Mandodarī keenly aware of the law of retribution. "This destruction of the leading Rākṣhasas," said she, "has proceeded from your anger and lust. The saying that the tears of chaste damsels do not fall uselessly on the ground has been verified in your case."[45]

Mandodarī's clear mind made her judge herself also aright. She said: "My father is the king of the Dānavas, my husband the lord of the Rākṣhasas and my son the subduer of Indra. I was greatly proud of this and was always confident that my protectors were undaunted, dreadful and noted for their strength and manliness."[46] That pride was removed by Rāvaṇa's fall. The virtuous wife that she was, she had done her duty by repeatedly warning Rāvaṇa. "I warned you," she bewailed, "against making enmity with Rāma, but you did not pay heed to my words; and this is the result!"[47]

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[41] 5. 49. 15-8.
[42] 6. 49. 26-7.
[43] 3. 47. 27-8.
[44] 6. 114. 27-30.
[45] 6. 114. 73, 67.

As events took shape, she got more and more support for her beliefs regarding Rāma and Sītā. Said she: "O you of wicked understanding, it was for the destruction of your wealth, yourself and your relatives that you suddenly cherished a passion for Sītā, who is greater than even Arundhatī and Rohiṇī. You have been burnt by the fire of her devotion to her husband."[48] About Rāma she said: "It is evident that the great ascetic Viṣhṇu, having truth for his prowess, the soul of all beings, always beautiful and invincible, assuming the shape of a man and encircled by the celestials in monkey shapes, has for the welfare of mankind slain you, the dreadful enemy of the gods!"[49]

Majestic in her tears, she stands facing the tragic consequences of having married Rāvaṇa, who "propitiated fire, performed great austerities and was conversant with the Vedas,"[50] but who also "slew many a pious person, hindered the devotions of sages and perpetrated numberless other dreadful deeds."[51]

5. Tārā

Mandodarī's effort to release Sītā had its parallel in Tārā's attempt to restore Rumā to Sugrīva. Both failed miserably owing to the attitude of their husbands. While Vāli, stronger than Rāvaṇa—as was conclusively proved in a brief encounter between them[52]—resorted to force to take his brother's wife, Rāvaṇa, his counterpart south of Janasthāna, stooped to the level of a thief to take away Sītā! As Tārā belonged to a community distinct from the purely human, we need not feel very much surprised to see something strange in her behāviour in certain contexts. For example, her loyalty to her partner in life took some unexpected turns. When every one honestly believed Vāli to be dead, she became Sugrīva's wife. But when Vāli reappeared, she transferred her love to him once again! Sugrīva quite naturally pleaded that he was innocent[53] and expected Vāli to take evidence from the counsellors.

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[46] 6. 114. 40-1.
[47] 6. 114. 19.
[48] 6. 114. 20-1, 24.
[49] 6. 114. 14-7.
[50] 6. 112. 23-4.
[51] 6. 114. 50-3.
[52] 7. 34. 36-8.

It is clear, however, that Tārā repeatedly pressed Vāli to recall his brother and win his love by returning Rumā to him. When Vāli was about to rush out for the final fight, she made her appeal doubly powerful by adding military considerations[54] to the usual moral approach. But the only concession Vāli would make to "her wish" was to assure her that he would merely defeat Sugrīva and not slay him outright![55] As she could not do anything further, she "who was gifted with the knowledge of *mantras* (mystic formulae)" performed *swastyayana* (protective rites) and sent him forth with her prayers for his victory.[56]

Tārā was bold. When she saw the monkeys fleeing in terror from the presence of Rāma, she rebuked them and rallied them, as any queen may be expected to do when the king falls. As Vāli was fully aware of these qualities of his wife, he took special care, during his last moments, to impress upon Sugrīva the necessity of consulting her on all important occasions. "Tārā's advice," he said, "never goes without effect."[57]

After Tārā had lamented for some time, Hanūmat tried to cheer her up by saying, "These monkeys, this son of yours and this kingdom belong to you. Abiding by your commands, let Aṅgada govern the country."[58] Tārā did not deny her ability to carry on the administration. She merely said: "I cannot myself govern this kingdom, nor can I confer it on Aṅgada. That duty devolves upon his uncle Sugrīva now."[59] Vāli, whose life was fast ebbing, realized the gravity of the situation, and calling Sugrīva to his side, instructed him to take charge of the administration, keeping Aṅgada as heir-apparent.

Seeing Sugrīva broken down owing to this expression of large-heartedness on the part of his dying brother, Rāma remained stupefied for some time with tears in his eyes.[60] Tārā too went up

[53] 4. 10. 10-1.

[54] 4. 15. 17-21.

[55] 4. 16. 7.

[56] 4. 16. 12.

[57] 4. 22. 13-4.

[58] 4. 21. 8-9.

[59] 4. 21. 14.

[60] 4. 24. 24.

to him and urged him to send her as a gift to Vāli with the selfsame arrow that took the life of her husband. Rāma poured soothing words upon her troubled soul. "Wives of heroes," said he, "never sink into despair."[61] The key-note in Tārā's life being this attitude of a hero's wife, she controlled her feelings and stopped bewailing.

Tārā was noted for her tact and resourcefulness. This was a great help to Sugrīva, as was particularly shown when Lakṣhmaṇa came in anger, imagining that Rāma's work was being sadly neglected. Tārā was not then in a fit condition for receiving any guest, much less a royal messenger. Still Sugrīva sent her to the gate to pacify the prince. When Lakṣhmaṇa's rebuke came to an end, she slowly told him that Sugrīva was not ungrateful, cunning or heartless. Of course, having suffered miseries for a long time, he was now to some extent absorbed in those pleasures which Rāma's own help had put into his possession. Was it not true that even a sage like Vishwāmitra forgot his duties when he lived with Ghṛitāchī? Then what is to be said of other people? It behoves Rāma to forgive one who has bodily weaknesses, is fatigued and is not yet satisfied with pleasures. She added a mild rebuke to Lakṣhmaṇa by saying that it was not proper for him to get angry without knowing what had taken place. "Rāvaṇa," she said, "is a wily warrior, and hence is the special need for Sugrīva's help." She then described the steps already taken to collect monkeys from all quarters. "Things have been so satisfactorily arranged," said she, "that this very day the mighty one will be joined by all those monkeys." As a finishing stroke, she added: "Seeing your face worked up with wrath, Sugrīva's wives know no peace and are again agitated by the fear that affected them of late."[62] The effect of this speech was that the "magnanimous" Lakṣhmaṇa asked Sugrīva to forgive him his rough speech.[63] Which husband, which king, which country will not be proud to have the services of ladies endowed with such rare talents?

Some of the happiest moments in Tārā's life must have been when she and other ladies of Kiṣhkindhā got into the Puṣhpaka at Sītā's special request, went to Ayodhyā and witnessed the coronation of Rāma.

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[61] 4. 24. 41-3.
[62] 4. 35. whole chapter.
[63] 4. 36. 20.

6. The Ayodhyā Group

General Features: Let us now turn to Ayodhyā and study the characters of the three queens of Dasharatha, the "mothers"[64] as they are often called.

Vālmīki is very brief in his description of the last days of the queens. He states simply that Kausalyā passed away, surrounded by her sons and grandsons, and that Kaikeyī, after performing many pious ceremonies, followed her and obtained peace in the land of the immortals.[65] But he writes elaborately about the ways in which the emotions of almost all of them became upset and finally got calmed down.

There were certainly many occasions when Kaikeyī took undue advantage of her influence over the king and ill-treated her co-wives. In one of her arguments Mantharā refers to this and explains why Bharata was likely to suffer at the hands of Rāma. "Your co-wife, Kausalyā," said she, "had formerly, through your pride and good fortune, been slighted by you; and she is sure to wreak her vengeance when Rāma gets the administration under his control."[66] Kausalyā felt humiliation because of this; and the king too was not unaware of the little acts of injustice that crept into their daily life sometimes. These, however, did not mar the smoothness of their lives in other respects.

One common sorrow united all the queens, and that was the painful fact that they were not blest with children. So, when Ṛiṣhyashṛiṅga was brought for a special sacrifice, all of them gladly got initiated into the ceremony along with their husband. "Then Kausalyā," being the seniormost among them, "performed the preliminary rites" and with great joy went through every detail of the ritual.[67] When, at the close of the ceremony, some *pāyasa* (milk porridge) came up from the fire, the king took it, thought for a while, and with calm deliberation gave, first a portion to Kausalyā, next a fourth to Sumitrā, then an equal portion to Kaikeyī, and finally all that remained to Sumitrā a second time. Vālmīki says that they all "became exceedingly delighted and considered themselves highly honoured."[68]

We find all of them again joined together, in complete amity, welcoming the four newly married couples returning from Janaka's court. They combined and "received the brides" with *homas* (offerings in fire) and other ceremonies usual on such occasions. These indicate that their daily life was marked more or less by a steady sense of harmony and goodwill. Vālmīki shows that when Kaikeyī was told about Rāma's installation as heir-apparent, her initial reactions were perfectly normal and favourable. She felt so glad that then and there she presented Mantharā with a costly ornament for bringing the welcome news. "I find no difference," said she, "between Rāma and Bharata, and I am therefore happy that the king intends to instal Rāma in the kingdom."[69] To all earlier attempts of Mantharā to poison her mind, "the noble Kaikeyī," says Vālmīki, replied only "by praising the virtues of Rāma." "Surely," said she, "Rāma is dearer to me than Bharata ; and he also loves me more than he loves Kausalyā. Besides, if the kingdom be Rāma's, it will also be Bharata's ; for Rāma regards his brothers even as his own self."[70]

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[64] 1. 77. 20.

[65] 7. 99. 15-7.

[66] 2. 8. 37.

[67] 1. 14. 33-4.

[68] 1. 16. 26-9.

Soon, however, the tide was to turn. For deep down in Kaikeyī's heart there was a current of jealousy, cruelty and ambition, whose capacity to create an explosion she herself hardly suspected. One of the purposes of Rāma's advent was to help people to get rid of their weaknesses and to strengthen their virtues. Dasharatha's wives were all essentially noble and good. That was why Rāma and his brothers were born as their sons. It was impossible, however, to allow petty jealousies to lurk in a corner of the heart of any one of them, in glaring contrast to the spirit of harmony and self-sacrifice found in the children. Sooner or later the impurities were bound to be eliminated. As it was, Nature herself arranged suitable means in the shape of a series of shocks caused by unexpected events,—Mantharā's success in rousing Kaikeyī's jealousy and greed, the banishment of Rāma, the death of Dasharatha soon after, and Bharata's starting for the forest to persuade Rāma to come back. We shall at the proper places see how each of these acted on the three queens.

Kaikeyī: In respect of boldness and resourcefulness Kaikeyī equalled Tārā. It was from her only that Mantharā had got the story of the boons. Dasharatha had taken her on the war-chariot while defending the gods against the Asuras (demons). Once it so happened that he became wounded and unconscious. Kaikeyī's quick eye perceived the danger, and she promptly got the chariot withdrawn from the thick of the fight.[71] It was in recognition of this valuable service that two boons were offered to her. This incident itself would have made her, in a sense, the favourite queen in the eyes of the king. At any rate, as there was nothing lacking in her life then, the need for claiming or even remembering the boons never arose. Hence it was only after careful and continuous bombardment against the soft spot in Kaikeyī's mental make-up at the time that Mantharā could make her see that the boons were there and that they could be utilized for saving herself from impending troubles.

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[69] 2. 7. 31-5.

[70] 2. 8. 18-9.

Kaikeyī had two serious weaknesses. One, common to all women, was anxiety about the safety of her only son, Bharata, and the other, a dim fear of retaliation by Kausalyā, whom she had sometimes consciously ill-treated.[72]

Vālmīki indirectly shows us that three invisible lines of force now met at a point. The first was the desire of the celestials to move Rāma and Sītā into the forest, so that Rāvaṇa might get a chance to carry off Sītā and thereby speed up the destruction he and his unrighteous hordes deserved. The second was the curse of the blind couple, whose only son Dasharatha had unwittingly killed in his younger days. It was to take shape as Dasharatha's separation from his sons during his last days.[73] As Bharata and Shatrughna were already away from Ayodhyā, some agency was needed to remove the remaining two, Rāma and Lakṣhmaṇa. The third was made up of two promises to be fulfilled in Dasharatha's lifetime. About one of these, Rāma himself later said to Bharata: "O brother, formerly when our father took the hand of your mother, he assured her father that the kingdom would be given as her marriage portion."[74] The second related to the boons given to Kaikeyī herself after the services rendered by her during war.[75]

When all these subtle forces combined to express themselves in visible form, there was only one result possible: Mantharā's crookedness and her intriguing arguments roused up Kaikeyī's lurking fear and made her remember the boons and press for two things: the immediate banishment of Rāma and the installation of Bharata as crown prince in his place. What Kaikeyī could not foresee at that time was that the next round of reactions would cause Dasharatha's death, shift the question from one of the crown prince's installation to the king's coronation, make Kaikeyī herself a widow, and, more painful than all this, force Bharata in spite of his goodness, to abuse her[76] and proceed to the forest to recall Rāma.

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[71] 2. 9. 15-6.

[72] 2. 8. 37; 12. 70; 20. 42.

[73] 2. 64. 54, 56, 60.

[74] 2. 107. 3.

[75] 2. 107. 4.

Having lost its moorings once, Kaikeyī's mind drifted helplessly amidst successive waves of jealousy, cruelty and greed. She cleverly managed to make the king promise, on solemn oaths, to do whatever she wanted. But on knowing that Rāma's exile was her chief aim, he called her a poisonous serpent which he had unwittingly brought into his house for his own destruction. He tried to show her that Bharata, being well grounded in righteousness, was sure to reject the kingdom got by unjust means. By turns he also appealed to her wifely virtues and her fear of public criticism. He even begged for mercy and proceeded to fold his palms in supplication! As a last resort, he threatened to renounce her and her son; but all to no purpose. She remained adamant; she said she would commit suicide if her boons were not granted.[77]

To Rāma she was equally rude. Pinning him down to an oath, as she thought, she said to him: "In this Kosala, let Bharata govern the earth, adorned with many pearls and diamonds, elephants, horses and chariots."[78] (Wealth and glory were uppermost in her mind during this whole period.) Rāma replied that he was willing at her slightest wish to hand over the kingdom to Bharata. Being obsessed with her triumph, she was unable to take the hint that there was no reason to suspect him or to trouble his father for this purpose. So she simply hurried him on by saying: "As long as you do not leave the city, your father will not bathe or eat anything."[79] Rāma replied in these pregnant words: "O worshipful one, I do not long to live in this world addicted to material wealth and pomp. Know me to be equal to the great sages in my devotion to virtue. If I can, at the sacrifice of my own life, satisfy any desire of my father, rest assured that it shall be carried out by me without fail."[80] Even these noble words failed to draw her attention to her own proper duty to the king, her husband!

Many things happened after this. Minister Sumantra rebuked

[76] 2. 74. 7. [77] 2. 11. 14; 14. 9-10. [78] 2. 18. 38. [79] 2. 19. 16. [80] 2. 19. 20-1.

her for her obstinacy. Vasiṣhṭha, the preceptor, scolded her for insisting that Sītā too should wear barks of trees, like Rāma, and go into exile. Even Dasharatha left her and went to stay in Kausalyā's apartments. And finally he passed away! Yet Kaikeyī remained dead to everything except her boons!

With Bharata's arrival, however, the scene altered. His refusal to have anything to do with her, his staunch loyalty to Rāma and his decision to go to the forest to make Rāma come back to the city opened her eyes. She found out the enormity of her crime, became fully penitent and joined the party that accompanied Bharata. If Bharata pleaded with his arguments, Kaikeyī pleaded through her silence.

Bharata, nevertheless, could not help saying to Rāma: "'I do not approve of the sin that my mean-minded mother committed in my absence. It is only because I am afraid of violating *dharma* (righteousness) that I do not impose a severe penalty and slay my wicked mother who deserves chastisement."[81] Rāma's reply was unforgettable by any present. Said he to Bharata: "Do not cherish, my brother, what your mother, prompted by love for you, or by covetousness, has done. You should act by her as one should by one's mother." And at the time of farewell, Rāma reiterated his advice by saying: "Protect mother Kaikeyī; do not be angry with her. Both Jānakī and myself solemnly exhort you to obey us in this respect."[82] No wonder that this supreme example of sacrifice on Rāma's part helped Kaikeyī to efface herself to such an extent that she whole-heartedly followed Kausalyā's lead ever afterwards. It must have been a happy day when, on Rāma's return to Ayodhyā, Kaikeyī had the good fortune, like other wives of Dasharatha,[83] to deck Sītā with her own hands.

Kausalyā: Kausalyā's strongest virtue was her devotion to her husband. Even in her most miserable condition, an appeal from any one to the interests of the king made her forget her personal sorrows and recover her equanimity. In this she was in direct contrast with Kaikeyī.

When Rāma announced his decision to go to the forest, Kausalyā's mind oscillated along three points. Sometimes she thought that she, as the mother, had the right to demand Rāma's stay in the

[81] 2. 106. 8-10.

[82] 2. 112. 19, 27-8.

[83] 6. 131. 17.

city even if the king, as his father, ordered his banishment.[84] At other times, she thought that if Rāma would not agree to stay back, she too would accompany him to the forest.[85] Thirdly, although willing to be in the palace and to serve the aged king, she felt that she would be unable to bear ill-treatment from co-wives.[86] At one stage Lakṣhmaṇa sided with her and threatened to kill his father, who was unduly "attached to Kaikeyī and contemptibly playing the child."[87] Kausalyā did not like the extremes to which Lakṣhmaṇa's indignation carried him. She gently said to Rāma: "You have heard what your brother said. If you like, do what seems reasonable to you."[88] Sometimes she also argued that if Rāma went away, she would resort to the vow of fasting,[89] or that he would suffer from want of proper food and drink.[90] But all these considerations vanished, as if by magic, as soon as her duty towards her husband was pointed out to her. "The monarch," said Rāma, in one round of the discussions, "has been duped by Kaikeyī. Now when I resort to the forest, surely he will give up his life, if, again, cast off by you. Therefore it is your duty to serve him as long as he lives. Know this to be the eternal virtue." Thus addressed by Rāma, Kausalyā said, "Truly it is."

Kausalyā was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time in rituals, worship and meditation. With her own hand she did many things during the sacrifice presided over by Ṛiṣhyashṛiṅga. When the installation of Rāma was announced, "Kausalyā, seeking her son's welfare, kept awake the whole night, being absorbed in meditation, and in the morning began worshipping Viṣhṇu. Wearing silk cloth, pleased and with the ease gained by performing rituals every day, she offered oblations into the fire and conducted other benedictory ceremonies."[91] It was precisely during this night and in the next morning that Kaikeyī, for her son's sake, as she thought, was following the tactics of the "anger-chamber" and tormenting the king with her ruthless speech!

After Rāma's departure, Dasharatha stayed with Kausalyā, expecting no doubt to comfort her and to get comforted. But her mind was so soft that it could not resist being carried away by painful thoughts. And instead of soothing the distracted king, she actually wounded him the more by her innocent outbursts. Said she in the midst of a long lament: "You cease to be mine. I am destroyed along with my son; destroyed are the citizens; your son and your wife alone are delighted."[92] Unable to bear these words, the king joined his palms and said, "You are ever affectionate to me, and do not treat harshly even enemies. Although aggrieved, you ought not to say anything unpleasant to me who am pressed down with woe."[93] Realizing her mistake, she immediately controlled herself and asked for pardon.[94] She explained that sorrow on account of her son's banishment made her speak harshly. "Sorrow," said she, "destroys patience, sorrow destroys knowledge of the scriptures, sorrow destroys everything, there is no enemy like sorrow.[95]

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[84] 2. 21. 25, 52.
[85] 2. 24. 9.
[86] 2. 20. 46.
[87] 2. 21. 19.
[88] 2. 21. 20-1.
[89] 2. 21. 27.
[90] 2. 24. 3.
[91] 2. 20. 14-5.

The meeting of Rāma and Bharata, which ended in Bharata's agreeing to use Rāma's sandals as symbols of authority, revealed the widely different modes in which *dharma,* loyalty to a lofty ideal, mutual love and respect can manifest in different people in a highly tragic context. The ideal shown by the brothers must have had its silent effect upon the mothers too. Kaikeyī's transformation, at any rate, became complete during this scene and henceforth she willingly followed the lead given by Kausalyā in all important matters.

Sumitrā : The situations that made other characters toss and roll violently found Sumitrā quite calm and steady. She was, therefore, able to infuse her own strength and courage into them with the minimum of words. Vālmīki gives us two fine glimpses of Sumitrā in this role.

The first relates to the scene of parting. After Rāma, Lakṣhmaṇa bowed down to her feet and waited for her blessings. In striking contrast to Kausalyā who wept for Rāma's departure, or to Kaikeyī who intrigued to secure the throne for her son, Sumitrā cheerfully urged her son to follow Rāma in his wanderings and exert himself diligently to minister to his wants. She also communicated to him her own superior outlook by asking him to regard Rāma as Dasharatha, Sītā as his own mother and the forest as Ayodhyā itself.[96]

In the second instance, Sumitrā is shown as giving Kausalyā a remarkable estimate of Rāma's greatness. She pointed out how improper it was for her to weep, when her son was remaining steady

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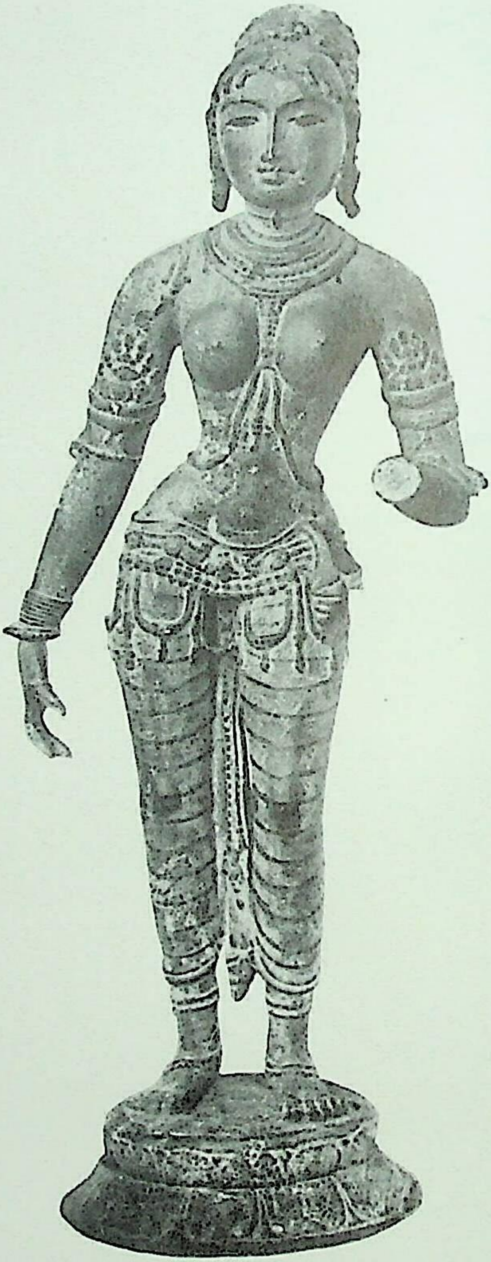
[92] 2. 61. 26.

[93] 2. 62. 6-7, 9.

[94] 2. 62. 11-2.

[95] 2. 62. 14-5.

[96] 2. 40. 8-9.



SĪTĀ

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in the pursuit of truth.[97] "Acquainted with Rāma's manifest purity and high magnanimity," said she, "the sun himself would not dare to burn him with his rays . . . He is the Sun of the sun, the Lord of the lord, Auspiciousness of prime auspiciousness, Fame of fame, Forbearance of forbearance and God of gods. What evil qualities will be perceived in him whether he stays in the city or in the forest?"[98] She wound up by saying, "I tell you this truly. You will again see your son coming, like the newly-risen moon, and paying homage to your feet." Thus, "inspired with hope" by the "noble, pleasant and blameless Sumitrā, clever in speech," Kausalyā became pacified[99] for the time.

Sumitrā was fortunate in many ways. She got two instalments of the sacred *pāyasa,* evidently because the aged king wanted to reward her for her mature and calm attitude, which made her give him her best without demanding anything in return. Her two sons showed the same characteristics, one always looking after the comforts of Rāma and the other of Bharata.[100] Unobtrusive and silent, Sumitrā spread her calmness wherever she went.

The storms that Sumitrā had to face, however, were in a way, limited. Rāma's exile was not a calamity to her in any personal sense. And as for Lakṣhmaṇa's following Rāma, it was balanced by Shatrughna's staying with Bharata. The first really serious loss to her came through the death of Dasharatha, but this was something she had to endure in common with all others.

7. SĪTĀ

Sītā, on the contrary, had a succession of painful experiences. If the test of greatness is the capacity to remain true to one's principles in spite of terrors and temptations, Sītā's greatness was undoubtedly more pronounced; for she had a greater power of endurance than any other character, except Rāma. Rāma and Sītā were equal in this respect, because every sorrow that affected the one affected the other as well, although they were situated in different environments. It is not claimed that Sītā did not cry or complain. Vālmīki shows her "shaking like a plantain leaf in the wind."[101] That was inevitable. Hers was not the endurance of the stone or the wall, with no outside expression for the inner workings. Hers was the special capacity, amidst the wailings and the complaints, to use her discrimination to cling to chastity, and to act in a manner suited to the dignity of her parents, her husband and other relatives.

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[97] 2. 44. 4. [98] 2. 44. 8, 15-6. [99] 2. 44. 21-2, 30-1. [100] 1. 18. 27-31. [101] 5. 25. 8.

It was considered to be one of the highest virtues of women to show forbearance, (*kṣhamā*) under the severest provocations. Before we study this aspect of Sītā's character, it is interesting to see its manifestation in the daughter of the sage Kushadhwaja. She was born by the sheer force of the merit developed by the father through his daily study of the Vedas. She was accordingly named Vedavatī. Her father intended to give her in marriage to Viṣhṇu, the lord of the celestials. To make herself fit for getting such a partner in life, she commenced self-purification through severe austerity, as Umā did for the sake of Shiva.[102] Finding her "wearing a dark deer-skin and matted locks," Rāvaṇa said, "It is not proper for you to lead an ascetic mode of life, which is fit only for an aged person. For whom are you putting yourself to this trouble?" "To fulfil my father's wish regarding Nārāyaṇa," said she, "I have fixed my heart even upon Him. Nārāyaṇa is my husband, and not any one else. Go your way, Rāvaṇa. By virtue of my austerity, I know all that takes place in the three worlds." Unable to check himself, Rāvaṇa caught her by the hair. Thereat Vedavatī got indignant and cut off her hair by using her hand as a sword! She said, "Having been outraged by you, I do not desire to live. I shall again be born to compass your destruction. A woman ought not to kill a man intent upon sin. Nor do I wish to utter a curse, for it shall cost me my austerity. But if I have done anything, given away anything, offered oblations into the fire, then I shall be the chaste daughter of some virtuous person, although I may not be born of any woman." Saying this, she ascended a funeral pyre in the very presence of Rāvaṇa. The sages who met Rāma told him, "It is she that has been born as the daughter of King Janaka. And Thou art the Eternal Viṣhṇu."[103]

What is once mastered and made part and parcel of the personality—what enters into the *samādhi* (superconsciousness) level—defies death and becomes available in every birth, whether such birth is compelled by undesirable tendencies or voluntarily undertaken for the welfare of the world. So in the case of Vedavatī, the

[102] 1. 35. 19-20.

[103] 7. 17. 1-36.

desire to marry Vishṇu was fulfilled when she reappeared as Sītā and married Rāma, while all the austerity she did on the slopes of the Himālayas was carried forward into the life of Sītā as single-minded devotion to her husband. She had no need for any other discipline, although, like anybody else of her day, she undertook some vows to keep her mental clarity and vigour undiminished.

Vedavatī's refusal to punish Rāvaṇa by a curse was repeated when, in her embodiment as Sītā, she had to deal with him in a number of situations. Since his first approach to her was in the guise of a mendicant, her anxiety was only to see that proper hospitality was shown to him, in the absence of Rāma and Lakshmaṇa. "This person is my guest," said she, "he is also a Brāhmaṇa ; he may curse me if I do not speak to him."[104] But when she found out that he was Rāvaṇa, come to carry her away by force, she was "highly enraged,"[105] and from that moment onward she dealt with him in a manner befitting Rāma's wife. Even when she was being carried away by Rāvaṇa across the sky, she had enough presence of mind to perceive that some monkeys were sitting on a hill-top below and to throw down a silk cloth and some ornaments to them, so that perchance if Rāma came that way, he might obtain some clue to search for her. Through her good luck, Rāvaṇa, who was in a hurry, failed to notice this.[106]

In all her talks with Rāvaṇa, either before her capture or during her captivity in Laṅkā, Sītā never hesitated to warn him fully of his danger. Her arguments were few, but she put them clearly and fearlessly before him. "Do you not feel ashamed," she said to him, "of this heinous act, namely, running away carrying off another's wife in the absence of her husband?[107] How could you stoop so low, having introduced yourself as the brother of Kubera, the lord of wealth, whom all the deities adore?"[108] This was usually followed by a request that she might be taken back to Rāma, while there was yet time to do so. "It behoves you," she said, "to take me to Rāma and make friends with him. Propitiate him ; he is kind to dependants. Respectfully take me there."[109] Sometimes she wondered why nobody seemed to advise Rāvaṇa to mend his ways. "Methinks," she said, "there are no pious men here, or even if there be some, you do not care to follow them."[110] But whatever his previous successes might have been, he would not be able to escape calamity, "having roused the bitter hostility of Rāma." "The thunderbolt," said she, "when hurled, may leave you, and Death himself may overlook you, but there is no safety for you when Rāma, the lord of men, is incensed."[111]

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[104] 3. 47. 2.

[105] 3. 47. 32.

[106] 3. 54. 1-4.

[107] 3. 53. 3.

[108] 3. 48. 21.

[109] 5. 21. 18-21.

Rāvaṇa could only chafe in anger, and hold out the threat that if she persisted in this attitude for a few months more, he would instruct his cooks to slice her body into bits and serve them for his morning meal![112]

Even to Rāma, as occasions arose, she talked with firmness and quiet dignity. Her first serious trial came when Rāma advised her to stay in the palace with "undisturbed mind," engaged in religious rites and fasts, and serving Dasharatha and Kausalyā.[113] Partly offended, she said: "Do you think me mean-minded? It is not proper even to hear your words. I have been taught by my parents to follow my husband in all conditions of life; and I shall carry out now what I have been taught."[114] Neither this reference to her tradition nor her weeping, neither her quoting of palmists[115] nor her threat to end her life proved of any avail. She then made a few stronger thrusts. "What did my father," said she, "think of you when he accepted you as his son-in-law? You appear to be a man outside, but you are really a woman inside."[116] "Do you," she continued, "like an ordinary actor, hand me over to another? Know me to be perfectly under your influence, like Sāvitrī following Satyavat. I have not, like one bringing stigma on her line, ever in my life thought of a second person. I must accompany you."[117] Rāma answered suitably. He said: "I do not long even for heaven if gained through your affliction. I did not know your full intention till now. So, although I was capable of escorting you, I spoke against your coming. . . . You are free to follow me and be a partner in my virtuous observances. Your determination is in perfect accord with the traditions of my family and yours."[118] He then instructed her to give away to Brāhmaṇas, poor people and others, including servants, her ornaments, clothes, beds, toys, conveyances and other fine things. She did so gladly.[119]

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[110] 5. 21. 9.

[111] 5. 21. 23-4.

[112] 3. 56. 24-5; 5. 22. 8-9.

[113] 2. 26. 28-31.

[114] 2. 27. 2, 8-9.

[115] 2. 29. 8-9.

[116] 2. 30. 3.

[117] 2. 30. 6-8.

[118] 2. 30. 27-9, 40-1.

[119] 2. 30-1.

Sītā and Lakṣhmaṇa: The second trial for Sītā came when Lakṣhmaṇa refused to believe that Rāma was in danger, although the shouts for help appeared to be in Rāma's voice. Extremely mortified, she said to him, "You are an enemy in the garb of a brother. Perhaps you are for my sake desiring Rāma's death."[120] Lakṣhmaṇa calmly replied that none could overthrow Rāma in fight, and that the shout must be the illusion caused by Rākṣhasas provoked by the slaughter of Khara and his followers. Lakṣhmaṇa also said that he could not disobey Rāma's order to stay there as her protector. Sītā then used the most painful accusation she was capable of making against Lakṣhmaṇa. Perhaps she meant it only as a desperate method of sending him in search of his brother. Said she to the truthful Lakṣhmaṇa: "It is a disgrace to you that you wish to possess me. You are a monster of wickedness. Perhaps Bharata has instructed you to do this. But your intention or Bharata's will not be carried out. I shall give up my life this very moment."[121] "You are a goddess to me," said Lakṣhmaṇa. "I spoke what was fair, and you have addressed me thus! Fie on you! Your destruction is at hand when you have begun to suspect me like this. May the deities of the forest protect you! And may I see you again when I return with Rāma!"[122] Sītā continued to say, "I shall kill myself through poison, by drowning in the river or by hanging."[123] She continued like this till Lakṣhmaṇa left the precincts of the asylum. Sītā paid heavily for this cruel thrust at Lakṣhmaṇa. Nemesis overtook her, first in the form of capture by Rāvaṇa, and secondly in the form of scandal, spread among some people in Ayodhyā! And this latter resulted in her exile!

Before Sītā handed over her head-ornament to Hanūmat, she gave him a true and glowing picture of Lakṣhmaṇa, thereby making ample compensation for the angry words uttered in Janasthāna. She specially requested Hanūmat to inquire after the welfare of "him in whom Sumitrā has an excellent son, who is lion-shouldered, long-armed, intelligent, majestic in appearance, who behaves towards Rāma as if he were his father, and towards me as if I were his mother, who is the servant of the elders, who controls his speech, who is dearer to Rāma than even my own self, and seeing whom Rāma has forgotten his deceased father. Speak to him so that he may remove my miseries!"[124]

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[120] 3. 45. 5-7.

[121] 3. 45. 21-6.

[122] 3. 45. 28, 32, 34-5.

[123] 3. 45. 36-7.

Even the earlier portion of Sītā's conversation with Hanūmat is remarkable. He went to her in her darkest moment when suicide with the help of her long tresses[125] appeared better than the prospect of being served as Rāvaṇa's breakfast. And he went with the happy news that thousands of monkeys, wearing shapes at will, were already engaged in searching for her, that he himself was one among those, and that he had come to Laṅkā by leaping over the sea. As love for Rāma and abhorrence of Rāvaṇa were the two main currents of thought in her mind then, she felt amazed, afraid and delighted by turns. And yet, after a long assuring talk, when Hanūmat moved closer to her for consoling her further, she recoiled from him all of a sudden. "You are surely that Rāvaṇa," said she, "whom I saw in Janasthāna in a mendicant's garb. You ought not to distress me who am helpless and famished with fasts!" But soon she recovered from her fright with the aid of her discrimination and said: "No; you cannot be the fiend whom I suspected you to be, since I experience great joy on seeing you. If you are really the messenger of Rāma, tell me something of his glories."[126] Hanūmat satisfied her and delivered Rāma's message to her. She too had her own message to be delivered to Rāma by him.

At this stage Hanūmat proposed to end her sorrows at one stroke, if she would agree to seat herself on his shoulders on his return leap across the sea. She herself, she said, was able to "reduce Rāvaṇa to ashes with the fire of her chastity, but then Rāma's arrow would be deprived of its legitimate field of enjoyment." She, therefore, decided to remain where she was and suffer the agonies of captivity rather than make a secret escape from Laṅkā.

Her patience was in a way rewarded, for Rāvaṇa was killed, as Trijaṭā's dream had indicated. But then came a bolt from the blue. For Rāma told her, in the midst of the eager crowd of his followers rushing in to have a view of her, that he could not take her back at all! He asked her to go wherever she liked, and stay with whomsoever she chose—Lakṣhmaṇa or any other brother, or Sugrīva or Vibhīṣhaṇa! His own work, he said, was only to vindicate the honour of his family, and that was accomplished by the destruction of Rāvaṇa and his forces. Hearing those harsh words of Rāma, uttered before the great assembly of monkeys and Rākṣhasas, Sītā slowly wiped her tears and said: "My body was indeed touched by another, but it was not in my power to prevent it. My heart is in my control, and that is directed towards you." She went round Rāma and climbed the funeral pyre, saying, "As I who have got a pure character have been considered vile by Rāma, may Fire, the witness of people, protect me on all sides!"[127] When she came safe through the fire ordeal, and the celestials proclaimed not merely her purity but even her divinity, Rāma accepted her, saying, "Sītā is mine, as the rays belong to the sun."

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[124] 5. 38. 58-65.

[125] 5. 28. 17-8.

[126] 5. 34. 13-9.

But she was not destined to be happy in the company of Rāma for long. Their lives, indeed, were not meant for their own enjoyment, but only to show by example how to lead a life of high ideals on earth. This time some people of Ayodhyā raised a scandal against Sītā, and Rāma decided to banish her forthwith! Kings and those who serve them have often to do most unpleasant things. The person selected to execute the order happened to be Lakṣhmaṇa. He sorrowfully explained to her that it was only fear of the calumny that made Rāma renounce her. He added: "Do not consider yourself guilty in any way. Rāma has commanded me to leave you near the hermitage of Vālmīki on the pretext of satisfying your desire in your present condition."[128]

This second instalment of forest life differed materially from the first. Now she was alone, and there was no Rāma with her. She was also at a loss to know how to answer the sages, if they asked her for what sin Rāma had banished her. She could not think of jumping into the river for by committing suicide she would be terminating her husband's line![129] Even in such a painful plight, the message she sent back through Lakṣhmaṇa was clear and dignified. She wanted him to tell Rāma that she considered it her duty to put a stop to any bad name that might come to him. It was also proper that she should work out her husband's well-being even at the sacrifice of her life.[130]

Years later, from the chanting of Lava and Kusha, Rāma found out that Sītā was alive. Although personally he knew her to be chaste, and Vālmīki publicly certified to the fact of her being pure, still Rāma insisted on a second ordeal to convince all possible doubters. This time there was no wider purpose to be served by Sītā's continuing to remain with Rāma; for Kusha and Lava had been accepted by Rāma as his heirs. The line was not in danger of extinction. So, this time, when Sītā invoked her purity, she asked only for a place within the earth.[131] In all important ceremonies which Rāma performed in later years, he kept by his side a golden image of Sītā, as a visible representation of the idol that occupied his heart all along![132]

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[127] 6. 119. 24-6.

[128] 7. 47. 13-5. She was an expectant mother.

[129] 7. 48. 7-8.

[130] 7. 48. 13-4, 17-8.

Like any lady of the higher classes, Sītā had normally a desire to enjoy a few innocent pleasures. Under this category must be included her uncontrollable fancy to catch the golden deer. It was her misfortune that this should, in its own way, lead to tragic consequences and make her life a prolonged attempt to balance herself against them. In this heroic struggle, she fought her battles in a manner appropriate to the wife of Rāma. She had a twofold motto: She would, as she herself said to the Rākṣhasīs, ever remain devoted to Rāma. She would also sacrifice all her comforts, rights and privileges, including the company of Rāma, and willingly undergo personal humiliations, if thereby Rāma could be held up before the world as an ideal king, noted for his prowess, purity, truthfulness and sense of justice. All glory was to be his, and the necessary sacrifices hers!

8. CONCLUSION

We have made a rapid survey of the mental movements of the great women described by Vālmīki. Our aim has been to show by what simple vows or disciplines in the domestic, moral, emotional or meditative fields, each overcame resistances and temptations and slowly built up a rounded personality. Efforts have been made, wherever possible, to state how enhanced purity of mind helped to create a better insight into the nature of things. Purity of character and an indomitable will to undergo various sacrifices are absolutely needed for progress, individual and collective, in any society and in any age. Hence the selection and arrangement of facts in the present study have been made with the intention of showing how such virtues were diligently cultivated by the different characters.

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[131] 7. 97. 15-7.

[132] 7. 99. 7-8.

CHAPTER VIII

MAIN WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

1. Introduction

The Mahābhārata,[1] the great Epic of India, has enshrined for us certain imperishable ideals of Indian womanhood. These ideals we find embodied in a most perfect manner in the lives of Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Draupadī, Damayantī, Sītā and Sāvitrī. The most important of these ideals, however, is an abiding faith in *dharma* or the moral order of the universe. These noble women did realize that there was a moral law, ever present and ever active, which regulated the universe and made it an organic whole. *Dharma* to them was not merely a matter of ceremony or conventional ritual and forms ; it had a larger and more fundamental significance than that of religion as commonly understood by us. It included the whole individual and social conception of law and impulse, conduct and worship. *Dharma,* in the entire *Mahābhārata,* really is the force or principle that binds together the entire universe.[2] It implies also the union of traditional thought and faith, of common custom, loyalty and understanding, that makes human society an organic unity. Patience, steadfastness and sincerity are needed for understanding and realizing this broad conception of *dharma,* and it is a matter of supreme satisfaction that the main women characters in the *Mahābhārata* rose to the level of this *dharma,* and by their character and conduct they proved that such a level of righteousness could be reached in human lives. They had no doubts or misgivings as to the existence of this all-pervasive and all-embracing principle, and so at a moment of supreme crisis in the fortunes of the Kuru family, Gāndhārī could utter these ever memorable words to her son Duryodhana: "Where there is righteousness, there is victory." In the affairs of men, sometimes wrongdoing, no doubt, flourishes, but the eternal lesson of the *Mahābhārata* is that by unrighteousness man may prosper for some time, gain

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[1] The references to the text in this and the next article are from the Bombay edition of the *Mahābhārata.*

[2] 8. 69. 59.

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what appears desirable and conquer enemies, but he ultimately perishes at the root.[3]

2. GĀNDHĀRĪ

Undoubtedly, the noblest and best of the women characters in the *Mahābhārata* is Gāndhārī. She, more than any other person, in the Epic kept her faith in the moral order undimmed, and in the hours of supreme crisis in her life, she always unhesitatingly sacrificed narrow, personal, selfish interests, and embraced the cause of virtue and righteousness. This she did even at the peril of herself and the fortunes of her family. She kept aloft the standard of *dharma* and asked others to act in the same manner. After the terrible disaster of the Kurukṣhetra War, in which she lost all her hundred sons and other near relations, Gāndhārī stood firm and maintained her unflinching faith in the triumph of the moral law, and she could boldly express her feelings to that effect.[4]

The life-story of Gāndhārī, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata*, may now be briefly told. Maharṣhi Kṛiṣhṇa Dwaipāyana, the famous author of the *Mahābhārata*, mentions her devotion to duty and righteousness in the very forefront of his introduction to the great Epic. Gāndhārī was the daughter of Subala, the king of Gāndhāra in the north-west of India. Bhīṣhma, the uncle and guardian of the Kuru prince Dhṛitarāṣhṭra, was in search of a proper bride for the prince, and he heard from brahmins that Gāndhārī was an exceedingly pious and dutiful girl who would be Dhṛitarāṣhṭra's proper wife. Messengers were accordingly sent from Hastināpura to Gāndhāra with the marriage proposal. At first Subala had some hesitation in entertaining the proposal on account of the blindness of the bridegroom, but considering the nobility, greatness and reputation of the Kuru family, he decided to give Gāndhārī in marriage to Dhṛitarāṣhṭra. Gāndhārī, as soon as she knew that her husband was blind, made up her mind that she would voluntarily deny herself the pleasures of eyesight by wrapping her eyes with thick bandage.[5] This bandage she kept on throughout her life, never wavering for a moment—so great was her devotion to her husband.

Gāndhārī gave birth to one hundred sons, but these sons did not fulfil the expectations of the virtuous mother. She never approved of

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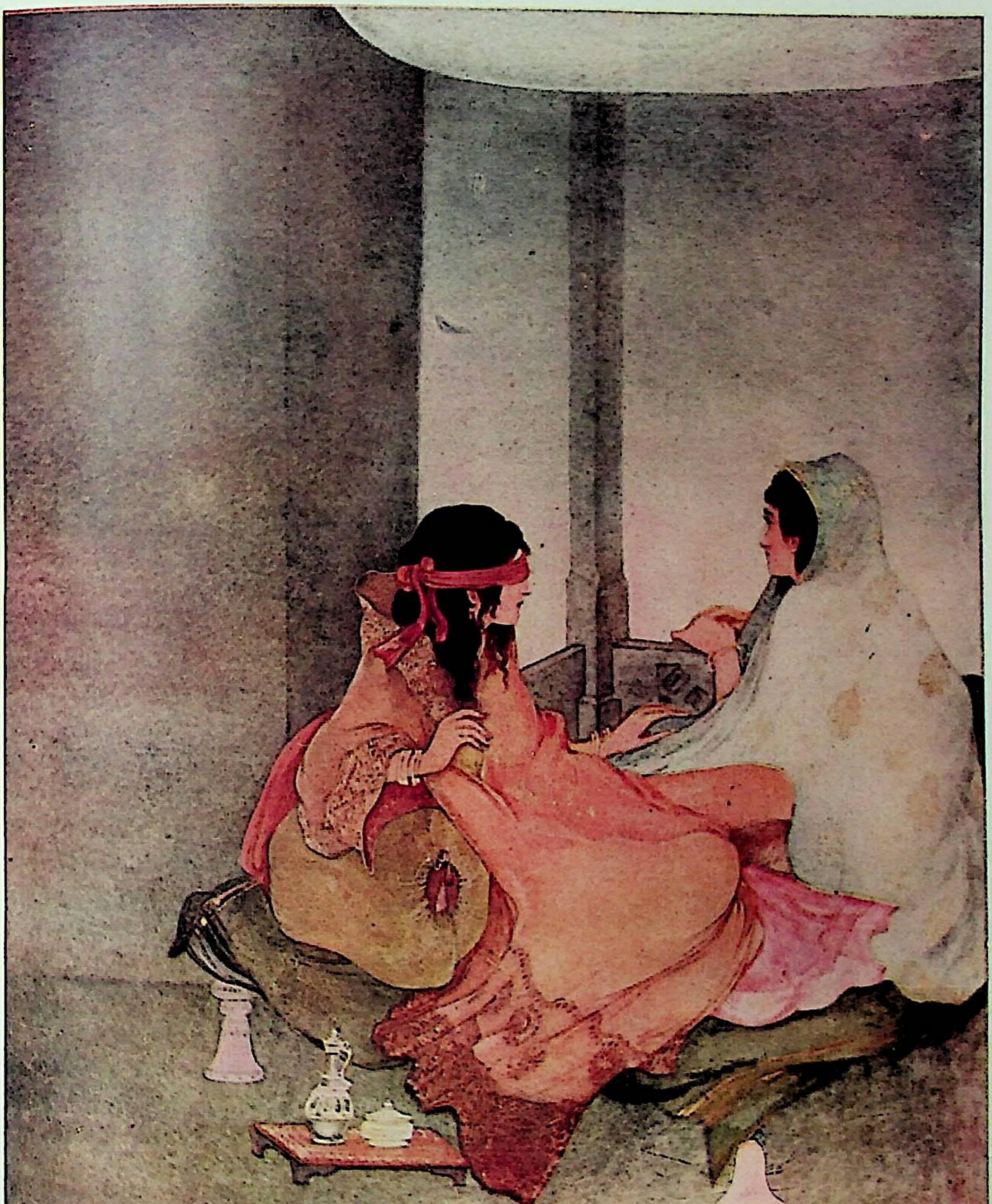
[3] 3. 94. 4.
[4] 11. 17. 6.
[5] 1. 110. 14.



GĀNDHĀRĪ

Artist: Nandalal Bose

Courtesy: K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review)

the conduct of her sons towards their Pāṇḍava cousins, and often appealed to her husband to check their evil propensities. In the game of dice at the court of Hastināpura Yudhiṣhṭhira gambled away his all; he lost his kingdom, fortunes, his brothers and even his dear wife. There was a great jubilation at the court, in which the old King Dhṛitarāṣhṭra also joined. But there was one person in Hastināpura on that day who was terribly stricken with grief. It was Gāndhārī. On seeing the base and irreligious conduct of her sons and the unmerited and unjust sufferings of the Pāṇḍavas, she approached her husband and asked him to express his entire disapproval of the conduct of their wicked sons. She went even a step further, and preremptorily told her husband to banish Duryodhana, who had become a disgrace to the whole Kuru family.

As a mother Gāndhārī never allowed her love and affection for her sons to get the better of her judgement and wisdom. Her voice throughout the *Mahābhārata* is the voice of warning to her sons, who were treading the path of error and injustice. Her constant exhortation to Duryodhana was to make up the quarrel existing between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas and to find out a formula of peaceful and amicable settlement. When Shrī Kṛishṇa came to Hastināpura on the eve of the Kurukṣhetra War as the plenipotentiary of the Pāṇḍavas with specific peace proposals, and when these proposals were being contemptuously rejected by Duryodhana, Gāndhārī throwing aside all hesitations, appeared personally in the royal court of Hastināpura and sternly rebuked Duryodhana for his wayward conduct. She plainly told her son in the midst of the entire assembly that the wages of sin was death. She also said that war did not solve any problems; on the contrary, it led to further complications. So her definite and emphatic advice to her son was to restrain his greed and desist from war.[6]

Duryodhana, however, had no respect for these sage words of his mother and adopted war as an instrument of his policy. After the outbreak of the Kurukṣhetra War, which lasted for eighteen days, Duryodhana used to visit his mother every day before going to the battle-field, in order to seek her blessings.[7] The pathetic prayer of Duryodhana was that his mother should wish victory for his cause, but in spite of his repeated entreaties, Gāndhārī always uttered the highly significant words before Duryodhana that righteousness always and invariably triumphed. After the conclusion of the War, in which all her sons were slain, Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa, after pacifying Gāndhārī, asked her permission to go away immediately to save the Pāṇḍava princes from an impending danger from Ashwatthāman. She quickly asked him to depart and save the Pāṇḍava princes from this disaster; such was her composure in the midst of a terrible calamity, and so great were her sense of duty and her affection for the Pāṇḍavas. There was only one occasion when she seemed to be overpowered by terrible grief. Before the dead bodies of her sons in the bloody battle-field of Kurukṣhetra, she fell unconscious on the ground.[8]

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[6] 5. 129. 40.

[7] 11. 14. 8; 11. 17. 6.

Gāndhārī made Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa responsible for the Kurukṣhetra War and uttered a fearful curse on the Yādavas, of which he was the most distinguished representative. She prophesied that a cruel calamity would overtake the house of the Yādavas, inasmuch as Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa ignored or failed to prevent the ruinous war between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. On the strength of her chastity and asceticism, she even said that Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa himself in no distant future would fall a prey to a foul death. It is important to bear in mind in this connection that Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa smilingly accepted this curse and recognized her truthfulness, piety and penance.

After the Kurukṣhetra War, Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and Gāndhārī lived for sixteen years at Hastināpura under the protection of the Pāṇḍavas. They forgot to a great extent their grief at the loss of their sons on account of the wonderful care and sympathy bestowed upon them by Yudhiṣhṭhira. At the end of the sixteenth year, however, they decided to go on a mission of final pilgrimage to the Himālayas. In this mission they were accompanied by Dhṛitarāṣhṭra's half-brother Vidura, his minister Sañjaya, and Kuntī, the mother of the Pāṇḍavas. On the eve of their departure, Dhṛitarāṣhṭra addressed a big assembly of the citizens of Hastināpura and men from the countryside. In this meeting Gāndhārī appeared by the side of her husband with her eyes bandaged, and made a request to the assembled multitude through her husband asking their forgiveness of the sins of her sons.[9]

The final departure scene of the old sorrowful King Dhṛitarāṣhṭra was pathetic. Kuntī came forward to lead the journey.

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[8] 11. 25. 37.

[9] 15. 9. 9.

Gāndhārī put her hands on the shoulders of Kuntī, and Dhṛitarāṣhṭra followed Gāndhārī, placing his hands on her shoulders. Vidura and Sañjaya were on either side of this procession. The citizens of Hastināpura wept aloud like orphans as the procession came out of the main gate of the city, but Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and Gāndhārī and others walked on unmoved. In the Himālayas, they spent a few more years till they were burnt alive by a conflagration which had enveloped that part of the forest in which they lived. Confronted by it, they showed remarkable courage and fortitude. They refused to escape from the fire ; on the other hand, they sat down on the ground with calmness and in a spirit of resignation welcoming the approach of the fire. On the day of her passing away from the earth, Gāndhārī's eyes were still bandaged, and she made the supreme sacrifice with unflinching loyalty to her ideals. She exemplifies the best ideals of Indian womanhood through the ages from the days of the *Mahābhārata,* and remains immortal in the minds of millions of Indians who derive their inspiration from the great Epic.

3. KUNTĪ

Kuntī, throughout the *Mahābhārata,* is the embodiment of patience, fortitude and self-sacrifice. She was the daughter of a king and was married to King Pāṇḍu of Hastināpura. She accompanied her husband to the Himālayas and lived for a number of years in a hermitage at North Paripātra. There she gave birth to three sons, Yudhiṣhṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna, and at the time of the birth of Arjuna, she heard the prophecy that this son of hers would in no way be inferior to Indra, the king of the gods, and that he would recover the lost glory and prestige of his family.[10]

After the death of her husband, Kuntī came to Hastināpura with her three sons and also with her two step-sons, Nakula and Sahadeva. She showed wonderful patience and forbearance while she passed her days under the care of King Dhṛitarāṣhṭra at Hastināpura. These were, to a certain extent, days of suffering and persecution, but Kuntī bore them well, and after passing through the ordeal of fire at Vāraṇāvata, where Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and his son Duryodhana planned the burning of the entire Pāṇḍava family, she escaped with her sons, after crossing the Gaṅgā and wandering for days together in the wilderness, to the kingdom of the Pāñchālas. There Arjuna, by his prowess and skill in archery, obtained Draupadī, the daughter of the king of Pañchāla as his wife. The prophecy about him, which sustained Kuntī throughout her life, was thus being fulfilled. The alliance of the Pāṇḍavas with Pāñchālas now compelled Dhṛitarāṣhṭra to reconsider his former views regarding his nephews. He sent Vidura to the king of Pañchāla with a request to send Kuntī and her sons back to Hastināpura, where they were now received with kindness, hospitality and honour. Yudhiṣhṭhira was given half of the kingdom of the Kurus with Indraprastha on the Yamunā as his capital. Kuntī was now the queen-mother. But her days of happiness and prosperity were short-lived, inasmuch as Yudhiṣhṭhira and his brothers, together with Draupadī, had to go to the forest, losing everything in a game of dice organized by Duryodhana and his uncle Shakuni. Kuntī was not prepared for this unexpected reverse of fortune. She was terribly aggrieved, but remained firm as a rock and uttered words of encouragement and advice to Draupadī as she was accompanying the Pāṇḍavas to the forest.[11]

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[10] 3. 312. 8-9.

Kuntī stayed at the house of Vidura during the thirteen years that the Pāṇḍavas had to live in exile. After this exile, the last year of which had to be passed incognito, the Pāṇḍavas returned and demanded their heritage. Duryodhana refused to return it, and war followed as a consequence. Before the outbreak of it, Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa made a last attempt to avert the great tragedy, and went personally to the court of Hastināpura with overtures of peace. While there, Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa saw Kuntī at the house of Vidura in order to receive instructions from her regarding the impending conflict. Kuntī wept bitterly and advised against compromise on humiliating terms. She could never forgive the Kauravas on account of the insults that they had heaped particularly on Draupadī, who was dearer to her than even her own sons.[12]

She was greatly pained that nobody except Vidura had protested against the inhuman conduct of Duḥshāsana towards Draupadī on the day of the game of dice. Vidura had made a last attempt to save the Kauravas from the impending destruction consequent on their iniquity. Referring to this episode Kuntī declared that the only person worthy of respect and worship in that great assembly of

[11] 2. 79. 3-4.

[12] 5. 90. 43.

Hastināpura was Vidura. She undoubtedly laid down a very important maxim necessary for the moral evolution of mankind when she said that a man attained moral elevation by his character and conduct, and not by his fortune or learning.[13]

Kuntī had some messages to deliver to her sons through Shrī Kṛishṇa. Her message to Yudhishṭhira was that his *dharma* was becoming fruitless by his failure to perform the duties of his station. To Bhīma and Arjuna she pointed out that it was now necessary for them to vindicate the honour of their mother. Her exhortation to Nakula and Sahadeva was that anything which was achieved by strength and prowess was to be preferred to life and fortune. She ended her speech by pointing out that Yudhishṭhira's power of understanding and common sense had become blunted by his excessive reading of religious texts. Her counsel was war.[14]

Kuntī now related the famous story of Vidurā, the queen of the Sindhu country. Vidurā had preremptorily asked her only son Sañjaya to embrace death instead of making compromise with disgrace and dishonour, since it was far better to arise and shine even for a moment than to cling to a life which was purposeless and devoid of glory.[15] Kuntī asked her sons not to accept poverty and humiliation on any account. Her one advice to them was war—for the vindication of the honour of their family and for the redemption of their lost glory and fortune.

The only occasion in which Kuntī seemed to show some signs of weakness and mental indecision was when she went out to meet her deserted son Karṇa on the eve of the Kurukṣhetra War. A terrible conflict passed through her mind when she visualized the impending battle between her two sons, Karṇa and Arjuna. Her motherly heart was bleeding at the prospect of the terrible fight, and she offered Karṇa alluring terms in order to win him over to the side of the Pāṇḍavas. But Karṇa remained steadfast in his loyalty to Duryodhana, and rebuked his mother for her pitiless desertion of him immediately after his birth. He described her as a person who was anxious to consult her own interests alone. Kuntī perhaps did not deserve this rebuke. As a mother who was suffering from unbearable mental agony, she conceived it to be her duty to play the part of a mediator; and throwing aside all hesitation and sense of

[13] 5. 90. 53.

[14] 5. 90. 73-8; 132. 5-6.

[15] 5. 133. 14-5.

shame, she interviewed Karṇa for the purpose of bringing about an honourable settlement between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Her firm conviction was that Duryodhana, being deserted by Karṇa, would come down to reach an agreement with her sons. Thus the impending catastrophe would be averted, and the two branches of the same family would be able to live together in peace and with mutual understanding.

The Kurukṣhetra War became inevitable. It was fought to a finish and was a terrible tragedy, for through it India became bereft of all male warriors. Sixteen years after this dire calamity, Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and Gāndhārī decided to retire to the Himālayas. Vidura and Sañjaya volunteered to accompany them. This was understandable, because both were attached to the old king. But what was most surprising was the attitude of Kuntī on this occasion. She had always urged her sons to fight and recover their lost fortune. This had been accomplished, and her son Yudhiṣhṭhira was the overlord of the whole of India. It was to be expected that Kuntī would be glad to continue indefinitely her life of ease and comfort after long years of suffering. But wealth and fortune had no more attraction for her. She made the supreme decision of her life that it was her duty to accompany Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and Gāndhārī in their journey to the forest. Her sons Yudhiṣhṭhira and Bhīma, in particular, tried to dissuade her from this resolution. But she remained firm. She pointed out that she had already enjoyed enough wealth and fortune ; her clear duty now was to adopt a life of asceticism. She had only one message for her sons, namely, that they should cultivate righteousness and be also generous.

In the Himālayas, Kuntī passed the remaining years of her life in placid contentment. Thoughts of Hastināpura and the fortunes of her sons no longer troubled her mind. Her devotion to Dhṛitarāṣhṭra and Gāndhārī during this period was also wonderful. Her end was as noble as her life. When a conflagration engulfed the forest in which she was living with Gāndhārī and Dhṛitarāṣhṭra, she remained steadfast and embraced death peacefully.

4. DRAUPADĪ

Draupadī, throughout the *Mahābhārata,* is the embodiment of courage, fortitude, sense and sensibility, and even pride and prejudice.

In a sense, she is the central figure of the great Epic, and her character has been depicted with wonderful skill by that master-artist, Maharṣhi Kṛiṣhṇa Dwaipāyana. The very circumstances of her birth made it abundantly clear that she had come to this world to fulfil a great destiny. She arose from a sacrificial fire lit by her father, Drupada, king of Pañchāla, and at once a voice from above announced that Draupadī would in course of time perform duties pleasing to the gods, and that the Kuru family would meet with disaster on her account.[16] Her beauty was indescribable, and her body emitted the fragrance of a blue lotus. In short, she was a veritable goddess in human form. When she came of age, her father arranged a *swayaṁvara sabhā* (marriage assembly) in order that she might have the opportunity of selecting her own husband. In that great assembly of the foremost heroes of India, Arjuna, by showing his prowess obtained Draupadī as his bride.

As a wife, Draupadī became the ideal mistress of the household when Yudhiṣhṭhira became installed as king at Indraprastha (modern Delhi) on the bank of the Yamunā. Yudhiṣhṭhira performed a great sacrifice called Rājasūya in which kings from different parts of India participated and rendered homage to him as the paramount over-lord. The ceremony lasted for a number of days, and the Kaurava brothers also came and joined the ceremony. Duryodhana became very jealous on seeing the immense prosperity of the Pāṇḍavas and returned to Hastināpura with a heavy heart.[17] He complained of many things to his father Dhṛitarāṣhṭra, but he testified with great candour to the fact that Draupadī had supervised the feeding of all alike, from the highest to the lowest, herself remaining without food till everybody was fed and satisfied.[18]

Mercy and solicitude for the poor and the distressed were not the only traits in the character of Draupadī. She was a woman possessing courage and a sense of dignity. When Yudhiṣhṭhira lost her in a game of dice at Hastināpura, and Duḥshāsana, brother of Duryodhana, taking recourse to unfair means, heaped all sorts of personal insult upon her in the open assembly, she turned round to the members present and asked for protection and justice. Finding everybody silent, she rebuked the open assembly saying that sense of justice had disappeared from India and that the members of the warrior caste had forgotten their duties. Otherwise, said she, "How could the members of the assembly, in an open session at Hastināpura, remain silent spectators of the injustice that was being perpetrated before their very eyes?"[19] With her hair dishevelled and her garments displaced, she called Duḥshāsana a fiend guilty of savage (*anārya*) conduct, as he was going to strip her. As her last resource, she made a passionate appeal to the elders in the assembly to come to her rescue. But even Bhīṣhma, the noblest man and greatest warrior of the age, remained inactive and pleaded as an excuse, his inability to understand the intricacies of *dharma*.[20] The only person who raised a protest was Vidura, who earnestly exhorted everybody present to express his disapproval of the heinous conduct of Duḥshāsana. Bhīma then announced that Duḥshāsana would have to pay dearly for his gross insults to Draupadī.

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[16] 1. 167. 49. [17] 2. 47. 14-5. [18] 2. 52. 48.

As a faithful wife, she accompanied the Pāṇḍavas in their journey to the forest. During the twelve years that they had to live there, Draupadī acted as the ideal mistress of the household. But she carefully nursed her suffering and humiliation, and did everything in her power to refer to that episode of her life, whenever possible. Once Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa came to the forest to inquire about them, and Draupadī, with tears in her eyes, told him that she could not forget for a moment that a woman of her status could be so openly humiliated in the presence of the Pāṇḍavas.[21] Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa at once solemnly assured her that the wives of the Kauravas would have to weep in the same manner as she was doing on that day. She was further told that she would become an empress. So she must cast away her grief.[22] Draupadī was satisfied for the time being, but later she entered into a controversy with Yudhiṣhṭhira regarding the attributes of *dharma* and their application to human affairs. In this, however, she was defeated, for Yudhiṣhṭhira succeeded in proving his thesis that *dharma* was an all-pervading law in the universe, and its pursuit was never fruitless. He asked her to banish all her doubts regarding the triumph of *dharma*.[23]

Draupadī was pacified and derived considerable solace and strength from his words. During the remaining years that she had to stay in the forest in the company of the Pāṇḍavas, she acted as an ideal wife bearing patiently all the difficulties of that life. When

[19] 2. 67. 40. [20] 2. 67. 47. [21] 3. 12. 120-1. [22] 3. 12. 130. [23] 3. 4. 6, 40.

Shrī Krishṇa and his wife Satyabhāmā came to meet the Pāṇḍavas in the forest towards the end of the period of their stay there, Satyabhāmā asked Draupadī in all humility how she could manage her household affairs with such credit, and how she could win the confidence, love and respect of such great heroes as the five Pāṇḍava brothers.[24] Draupadī's discourse on the duties and responsibilities of the wife on this occasion is one of the important chapters of the *Mahābhārata.*

The stay of the Pāṇḍava brothers with Draupadī, during the thirteenth year of their banishment, at the house of Virāṭa, the king of the Matsya country, was perhaps the greatest penance of their life. During that year they lived a life of complete self-effacement, since they had to pass it incognito, and all of them accepted occupations which were completely unworthy of their status. Just before their entry into the Matsya country, Yudhishṭhira was greatly perturbed on account of Draupadī. She was a beloved wife and, according to him, deserved to be maintained like a mother and honoured as an elder sister.[25] So he could not come to any conclusion in regard to the occupation that she should adopt at the house of Virāṭa. Draupadī relieved his anxieties by voluntarily accepting the life of a maidservant at the house of Virāṭa. In spite of her all-captivating beauty and her bearing, she submitted herself to performing the lowliest duties of the household. On one occasion she tearfully told Bhīma that her palms had become rough, and her fingers had developed corns by performing the hard work that was laid on her. Her tears did not really flow from the hard work that she had to do ; they were caused by the insults that she had received from Kīchaka, the commander-in-chief of the king. One day she sought protection from them in the open court of Virāṭa. But Kīchaka insulted her in the presence of all by kicking her down. The stern reproach that Draupadī administered to the king on this occasion is memorable. She had no hesitation in proclaiming that the law of the jungle, and not justice, was prevalent in the kingdom of Virāṭa ; she also declared that the king was unworthy of his royal seat, and that even the members of the court were not true to their *dharma,* inasmuch as they worshipped such an incompetent king.[26] She thus clearly hinted that the members of the assembly should rise against the king and depose him. The Virāṭa-parvan of the *Mahābhārata,* however, ends on a note of joy and merriment. On their identity being revealed at the end of their period of exile, the Pāṇḍavas cemented their friendship with the king of the Matsyas by a marriage alliance—the marriage between Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna, and Uttarā, the daughter of Virāṭa.

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[24] 3. 232. 4-5.

[25] 4. 3-14.

[26] 4. 16. 31. 33.

Then the Pāṇḍavas approached towards the Kuru country and established their camp at Upaplavya just on the frontier of the Matsya territory (modern Alwār, Jaipur and Bharatpur). There was a council of war, in which Drupada, Virāṭa, the Pāṇḍavas, Shrī Kṛishṇa and Draupadī participated. At the hour of crisis almost everybody counselled moderation and spoke in favour of a policy of peace. Even Bhīma was prepared to forgive and forget, but Draupadī remained adamant. She could on no account pardon Duḥshāsana and the Kauravas for the insults that they had inflicted on her. Addressing Shrī Kṛishṇa she said that if Bhīma and Arjuna were so down-hearted as to advocate a policy of peace, her old father Drupada would wage a relentless war against the Kauravas. In that war of vengeance, Abhimanyu, with her five sons, would march forward to exact the price of humiliation. She would have no peace of mind until she saw the severed hands of Duḥshāsana lying in the dust—the hands that had pulled her hair in insult. She was particularly pained by the words of Bhīma, who counselled peace and moderation in the name of *dharma*. Draupadī said that *dharma* was entirely misunderstood by Bhīma and others, and in her utter helplessness she burst into tears, taking the lock of her hair in her left hand as she denounced the policy of reconciliation.[27] Her spirited outburst was in every way worthy of her position and dignity ; it was her sworn revenge for outraged womanhood. She could be satisfied with nothing less than the utter extinction of her oppressors. Shrī Kṛishṇa was visibly moved by her bold speech, and assured her that he would himself try his utmost to wage the war of vengeance which would bring about the total annihilation of the Kauravas. This assurance, Shrī Kṛishṇa averred, was bound to be fulfilled, and Draupadī was destined, in the near future, to see the Pāṇḍavas recover their lost glory and fortune.[28]

The Kurukṣhetra War, as Shrī Kṛishṇa predicted, was a total war, and it ended in the complete annihilation of the Kaurava dynasty. The Pāṇḍavas got back their lost kingdom, and Yudhiṣhṭhira became the paramount suzerain of the whole of India. Draupadī was now an unquestioned empress, and she occupied the royal palace of Hastināpura made vacant by her enemies. For thirty-six years she passed her days there as a worthy consort of the Pāṇḍavas. But when Yudhiṣhṭhira and his four brothers decided to forsake the world and undertake a journey of pilgrimage into the unknown, Draupadī came forward and adopted the same course. Giving up royal dresses and garments, they all put on the robes of mendicants and left their seat of power, Hastināpura, for their final pilgrimage to the Himālayas and even beyond. First of all, however, they made a tour of the whole of India, east, south, west and north; before their final departure from this world, they wanted to have a last glimpse of their dear motherland in its entirety. That purpose accomplished, they did not cast a second look behind. Their life's mission was fulfilled. They passed through the almost insurmountable Himālayas, and saw a great desert on the other side.[29]

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[27] 5. 82. 35-42.

[28] 5. 82. 48-9.

As they were proceeding fast in their final great journey, Draupadī, who was not thoroughly fit for it, encountered a fall.[30] She had certain limitations in her character—and who has not?—which prevented her from achieving what she desired. The only pilgrim in the group who could reach the goal was Yudhiṣhṭhira, who was a model of unflinching moral virtues; he did not look behind, nor did he turn either to the left or to the right, but moved straight on. But, in spite of her failings, Draupadī remains a unique type of woman, not merely a fond and devoted wife, but a true helpmate and partner in life's affairs. She is perhaps the best illustration of Kālidāsa's famous verse: "A good housewife, wise counsellor, dear companion and a beloved pupil in the cultivation of the fine arts."[31] She was the very embodiment of *shrī* or good fortune in the house of the Pāṇḍavas. She was occasionally subject to moods of indignation, no doubt, but the loftiness of her soul, her unfailing courage in the face of disasters, her spirit of self-sacrifice, and, above all, her moral earnestness and spiritual integrity have shed a lustre on the ideals of womanhood in ancient India.

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[29] 17. 2. 1-2.

[30] 17. 2. 3.

[31] *Raghu-vaṁsha*, 8. 67.

CHAPTER IX

WOMEN CHARACTERS IN THE STORIES OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

1. INTRODUCTION

THE GREAT epic *Mahābhārata* has justly been regarded as a thesaurus of all the aspects of ancient Indian civilization. As could be expected, it abounds in stories concerning women of all types. There is no other book where the psychological development of womanhood can be so clearly marked, and where anecdotes in such profusion concerning women of all stages of life, from the highest to the lowest, have so truthfully been collected and handed down to posterity. It is not possible to deal here with all the anecdotes concerning women. So some of the characters have been chosen, and, instead of attempting a critical study of womanhood, efforts have been made to narrate in simple language some tales which will reveal the true character of the women of Bhārata.

2. SUKANYĀ[1]

Princess Sukanyā was the only daughter of King Sharyāti. She was endowed with youth, beauty, perfect health, gracefulness and a great cultural heritage. Once, when the earth was dressed by spring in its loveliest attire, when birds sang their sweetest and rivulets danced their merriest, King Sharyāti, accompanied by the royal family, went to the woodlands to enjoy sylvan sports. Princess Sukanyā, dressed in her simplest but prettiest, went with the royal party. Young, merry-making, mischief-loving maidens left their elders and tripped about in high glee, imitating the voices of warblers and collecting wild flowers from the trees and creepers.

In the same forest the great sage Chyavana had long ago begun his hard penance. Years had passed, and deep in his meditation he had forgotten the world. Dead leaves of trees scattered round him, sand and earth blown by the wind gently mounted over him, and, as time passed by, his body was buried in an ant-hill. None realized that hidden within it, and forgotten by the world, sat a great soul communing with the self-effulgent Brahman.

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[1] Parvan 3, chs. 121-5.

The young maidens danced about, and their sweet voices echoed and re-echoed through the woods. The unusual sound of young voices penetrated through the earthy mound, and the sage woke up from his long meditation. Through holes in the leafy soil over his head, he saw Princess Sukanyā, a lovely vision of youth and beauty and was so much charmed that he spoke to her again and again. But through long disuse his vocal organs had lost the power of speech, and the princess could not hear him. But as she was gathering some flowers, she saw what seemed to her like two gems shining through the holes of the ant-hill. "Sukanyā, curious to know what those were, took a hard, sharp thorn and inadvertently pierced through the eyes and made him blind."[2] In the twinkling of an eye Chyavana, towering over the little princess, stood up, trembling with anger. Princess Sukanyā was not only frightened but mortally ashamed of her carelessness and unwarranted cruelty. The king and queen, hearing the news, hurried to the scene, worshipped the great sage and begged of him to forgive their careless but innocent daughter. But Chyavana turned a deaf ear to all their pleadings and threatened them with a terrible curse unless Sukanyā married him and shared the life of a lone hermit in the forest. Sukanyā begged of her parents to let her marry him and do a little to atone for the incurable harm she had caused.

Such was the cultural education of that time that "Princess Sukanyā began serving her husband lovingly and practised hard penances, observing ascetic ordinances."[3]

In a small cottage she lived with her husband. Every morning, before birds began chanting their morning hymns, before the Sun-god appeared in the eastern horizon, driven in his fiery chariot drawn by seven horses, before the sweet-scented flowers opened their petals, Sukanyā would leave her bed of dry leaves, perform all her domestic duties and then take her bath. Such was her love for her husband that she would dress herself with the bark of trees and make personal toilet as would make her pleasing to her husband. Never did it enter her mind that her husband was but a blind, old man, past

[2] 122. 12-3.

[3] 122. 28.

the age of conjugal pleasures. She would cook delicious dishes for him, who hardly knew their distinctive taste; she tended the cows, made butter for the sacred fire as well as for cooking; she had a small garden, where she would grow such vegetables as were unknown to those who lived in the forest. Like a mother she attended to the needs of travel-worn guests.

She was the life and soul of this humble home. She was a loving wife, a devoted friend, a wise counsellor and a humble disciple, all rolled into one. She herself was very happy, but did her husband old Chyavana sigh secretly pondering over the fact that an old blind man was no fitting companion for a damsel of her beauty and culture?

One day when she was taking her bath, Ashwins, divine twins, distinguished for their beauty and mastery over medicine, saw her. Charmed with her beauty they asked: "O fair one, who are you and what are you doing in these woods?"[4] Sukanyā blushingly replied: "Know me to be the daughter of Sharyāti and wife of Chyavana."[5]

The handsome heavenly physicians were amused to know that such a picture of loveliness had been married to an old skeleton like Chyavana. So they said: "You shine in the forest like a lightning. We have not seen your equal even in the celestial world.[6] Bare of ornaments as you are, nonetheless you make all the forest fair; how much fairer might you appear in gorgeous robes and splendid jewels! Do take one of us as your husband, for youth will not endure."[7] Great was her indignation, and she replied proudly: "I am devoted to my husband, do not doubt my fidelity."[8]

The heavenly physicians were simply charmed to hear the princess professing her love and loyalty to her old, blind husband. So they told her who they were, and that with the help of their medical skill they could not only cure blindness but restore youth and health to her husband. They would do all that, but on one condition: after the rejuvenation she would choose one from among the three—Chyavana and the twin-gods—as her husband.

Sukanyā thought over the matter and decided like a good wife to refer to her husband and abide by his decision. Chyavana eagerly consented, and both of them went to see the celestial physicians.

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[4] 123. 3. [5] 123. 4. [6] 123. 6. [7] 123. 7-8, 10-1. [8] 123. 12.

The twin-gods asked the princess to let her husband dip into water, which he did. And so did the twin-gods and rejuvenated him. When they came out of the water, so much altered was Chyavana that he looked as if he were a true replica of the resplendent heavenly twins. Poor Sukanyā! How puzzled she got to see three beings rise out of the water, all looking alike and all seeing her with love and admiration. They asked her to choose one of them as her husband. For a time she did not know who was who, but her great love for her husband and her chastity helped her to recognize Chyavana. With a heart throbbing with love and gratitude, she came forward and threw herself into the arms of her husband, who was almost mad with happiness and held her in close embrace. The world outside ceased to exist for this wonderful couple, and the twin-gods thought it the right moment to vanish.

3. Jaratkāru[9]

King Parikṣhit, who was very fond of hunting, once chased a deer in the forest on foot and was exceedingly tired, when he came across a beautiful green pasture, where the cows were grazing peacefully. There he saw a sage drinking the foam falling from the mouths of calves as they sucked their mothers' milk. Shamika, the sage, was at that time observing the vow of silence. The king asked him which way the stag had gone. As Shamika was a strict observer of his vows and a kind-hearted man, he neither answered his question nor made any sign. The king was so indignant that with the end of his bow he picked up a dead snake lying near, and coiled it round the neck of the sage. To Shamika reverence and insult were alike; so he forgave the king. But this enraged his young son Shṛiṅgin so much that he cursed the king, saying that he would die of snake-bite within seven days. It actually happened: the king died bitten by Takṣhaka, a deadly snake, leaving an infant son named Janamejaya.

When Janamejaya ascended the throne, he came to know the cause of his father's death, and, being determined to take revenge, made preparations for a sacrifice to burn all the snakes in the world.

When Vāsuki, the king of snakes, heard about this, he was much perturbed. Then he was told by one of the snakes that he had heard that a great sage named Jaratkāru would marry Princess Jaratkāru, sister of Vāsuki, and a son born of that union would save the snakes.

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[9] Parvan 1, chs. 13-4, 39, 45-8.

The king was pleased to hear this and commanded some snakes to follow the sage Jaratkāru and let him know whenever he expressed a wish to marry. Then he went to his sister and with much hesitation told her what had happened. Princess Jaratkāru, the loveliest and wealthiest maiden of her time, was used to a life of luxury, whereas sage Jaratkāru belonged to a roaming sect of mendicants who never called anything their own. He practised hard penance, fasting for days together, and was an observer of the vows of poverty and celibacy. He also had a quick temper and cared for naught in this world. Yet the princess was delighted to hear that she could be the means of saving not only her beloved brother but also all his subjects, and promised to do whatever lay in her power.

In the meantime sage Jaratkāru met the souls of his ancestors, who told him that as he was the only surviving member of his family, he must marry and have a son ; otherwise they were destined to fall into hell. Jaratkāru said: "I made up my mind never to take a wife nor to earn money for livelihood, but for your sake I shall marry.[10] If ever I get a maiden of my name who at her request will be given to me as alms, and whom I shall not have to maintain, then, O my forefathers, shall I marry and not otherwise."[11]

This was reported to King Vāsuki. Princess Jaratkāru also listened to this undignified proposal, but accepted her fate without demur. The sage made one more condition: "She must not do anything disagreeable, for then I will leave her."[12]

Sage Jaratkāru, thin as a skeleton, with his body black with dust, hair unkempt and eyes blazing like fire, came to marry the princess of superb beauty, dressed immaculately. But as soon as she saw him, a deep love filled her whole being, and from that moment she worshipped the very ground her lord walked on. Day and night she served her husband and tried to make his life in the palace of her brother congenial to him. Forgotten were all her pleasures of girlhood. Dressed as the wife of an ascetic, she gathered flowers and other requisites for his daily religious rites and prepared simple food to suit his taste. In fact, the very spirit of the hermitage seemed to abide in that part of the palace where they lived. All was going on well, but one day, placing his head on the lap of his wife, Jaratkāru slept, looking very tired. When the sun was about to set, she thought: "What shall I do now? Shall I wake my husband or not? He is a strict observer of his religious practices, and yet how can I disturb his sleep without offending him? If I wake him up, I know he is sure to get angry ; but if twilight passes away without his prayer being said, his spiritual welfare might be jeopardized."[13]

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[10] 13. 27.

[11] 46. 8-9.

[12] 47. 3.

It was a difficult dilemma to solve. She had to choose between her own happiness and the spiritual welfare of her husband. As before, she decided to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of her husband, and woke him up, though trembling about her future. At this the sage flew into a rage and said: "You dare to insult me! I shall immediately leave you." Like one thunderstruck, the princess stood rooted to the ground and said: "O true Brāhmaṇa, I did not wake you up to insult you. But I did not want your time for evening prayer to be gone. Do forgive me."

But in vain she pleaded. The roving mendicant had entered the householder's life for the sake of his ancestors, and his soul was yearning to go back to his old life of pure asceticism. So he said: "O fair princess, I have never spoken a falsehood in my life ; so go I must." The princess was almost mad with grief. With her voice choked with tears, she begged her husband not to leave her. "I want to be the mother of your son, though I do not know whether I am going to have one. For, the welfare of my people depends on my getting a son through you."[14] He replied: "O blessed one, you *are* carrying a child of mine, who will be as bright as fire, a seer of truth, highly virtuous and a master of the Vedas and Vedāṅgas."[15]

Even a fiery soul like him cooled down before this noble princess, who, for the welfare of her husband as well as of her kith and kin, had renounced all the pleasures of the world and served him day and night like a menial. For one little moment he stopped, blessed her for making his life so happy and asked her not to grieve for him when he would be gone. A mother she became and brought up their child Āstīka, teaching him to love his mother's people, the Nāgas, who were not so advanced as a race, and to revere his noble father and follow his footprints until he became perfect.

[13] 47. 17, 19.

[14] 47. 38.

[15] 47. 42.

4. PATIVRATĀ[16]

There was a Brāhmaṇa named Kaushika, well versed in the Vedas, who left his home and old parents to attain spiritual eminence by practising hard penances. Once, sitting under a tree, he was studying the Vedas when a crane dirtied his body. He got so angry that he fiercely looked at the crane, and it fell down burnt to death. He was very sorry for this, since he realized that even after leading a life of such austerity he had not been able to conquer wrath.

He then entered a village and began roaming from door to door with his begging bowl. When he approached a certain house, the lady of the house took the bowl from his hand, and, finding it not so clean, started to clean it. In the meantime her husband returned home hungry and thirsty. As soon as she saw her weary husband, she forgot the Brāhmaṇa. With loving care she brought cold water to wash the feet of her husband, a comfortable seat for him to sit on and delicious food to appease his hunger. While busy feeding her husband, she saw the Brāhmaṇa waiting for her. Much ashamed of herself, she came out with the bowl cleaned and full of alms and apologized to him humbly. Forgetting his previous remorse at being angry, the Brāhmaṇa looked at her with bloodshot eyes and said: "Lady, why did you request me to wait and did not let me go immediately?"[17] The dutiful wife replied modestly: "Forgive me, O great scholar, I regard my husband as a great deity, and as he returned home tired and hungry, I was attending to his needs."[18]

One would think that these humble words of apology, so sweetly spoken, would be accepted unhesitatingly. But no, this proud scholar said indignantly: "You do not consider a Brāhmaṇa worthy of high regard! You consider your husband superior to him! You are a householder and still insult a Brāhmaṇa. Not to think of a mortal like yourself, even Indra, the lord of heaven, himself bows down to a Brāhmaṇa. Proud woman, have you never heard from the elders that a Brāhmaṇa is like a fire and can even burn the whole earth?"[19]

The lady listened to it all and thought it was time to teach him a lesson. So she looked at him calmly and said: "O ascetic, I am not a crane, so you had better control your temper. You are angry, but what can you do thus looking at me with angry eyes? I never disregard high-souled Brāhmaṇas, who are like unto gods."[20] But she remembered that it did not behove a virtuous housewife to speak harshly, especially to one who had come begging for alms. Besides, she felt pity for him. So she said:

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[16] Parvan 3, chs. 204-5.

[17] 205. 18.

[18] 205. 20.

[19] 205. 21-2.

"O sinless one, please forgive this fault of mine. I know the strength and dignity of Brāhmaṇas who are learned.[21] . . . Their anger is boundless, and yet their graciousness is limitless. So forgive the offence with which I have caused your annoyance. I consider my husband superior to all the gods, and, O Brāhmaṇa, with unswerving devotion I serve him, and see the virtue I have earned thereby. I knew without seeing it that you burnt the crane with but one look of anger.

"The gods call him a Brāhmaṇa who has conquered wrath and infatuation and who speaks the truth and pleases his preceptor. The gods call him a Brāhmaṇa who does not return blow for blow, who is clean, who has control over himself, and who is pious and devoted to the holy scriptures. The gods know him to be a Brāhmaṇa who has conquered both lust and anger, who is learned and catholic in spirit, and who considers all as equal to himself.[22] . . . Religion which is unchangeable, which lasts through eternity, is too subtle for comprehension and is based on truth.[23] You cannot comprehend religion by studying its principles only. O Brāhmaṇa, if you really are not cognizant of this supreme religion, then go to Mithilā and ask the hunter Dharma-Vyādha, who is truthful, self-controlled and devoted to the service of his parents. This hunter, who lives in Mithilā, will explain what true religion means. O best of the twice-born, go there at your will and may good luck attend you."[24]

Then she remembered she was but a woman, a mere housewife! So she prayed for forgiveness saying: "But, oh, please forgive this chatterbox of a woman. You know seekers of righteousness are incapable of killing women!"[25]

Kaushika remembered his young days, when he had neglected his duties towards his parents and repented much. So charmed was he with the noble, yet motherly advice of this lady that he thanked her humbly as he took leave of her, saying: "O virtuous lady, your words of reproof have done me a world of good. May you be blessed! I shall go now and do what will make my life a blessing."[26]

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[20] 205. 23-4.

[21] 205. 25.

[22] 205. 30-5.

[23] 205. 41.

[24] 205. 43-5.

[25] 205. 46.

5. SHAKUNTALĀ[27]

Swift was the youthful king Duṣhmanta, but swifter was the deer which ran to dodge the deadly arrows of the king who went on a hunt in a dense forest. In the centre of that forest the king saw a delightful retreat, the hermitage of the ascetic Kaṇwa, learned, kind and a strict observer of the vow of celibacy. To pay his respects to the great sage, he left his attendants and all emblems of royalty and humbly walked into the holy retreat. But finding none, he called out. A young maiden, beautiful as the goddess of fortune, but dressed as an ascetic, came out and invited him to enter the humble cottage. The king, after introducing himself, told her that he had come to pay his respects to the great sage Kaṇwa. The maiden said that her father had gone to gather fruits and would soon return.

The more the king listened, the greater was his infatuation for this lovely girl—so sweetly modest and yet so cultured! He asked her who she was and learnt that she was really the daughter of the royal sage Vishwāmitra and Menakā, the celestial dancing girl, but that she was discarded soon after birth and found by Kaṇwa lying surrounded by birds of the forest. "So kind-hearted is my father," she said, "that he never thought twice, but took me in his arms and brought me up like his own daughter. Indeed, no father could love a daughter more than he does me. He calls me Shakuntalā, since I was protected by *shakuntas* or birds." Could a daughter of one's own flesh and blood speak more affectionately of her father? Knowing fully well that Kaṇwa was but a foster-father, she yet served him like a true daughter and made his hermitage a real home.

King Duṣhmanta, listening to this recital, exclaimed: "O blessed maiden, so you are a princess of royal birth; a worthy consort you will be of King Duṣhmanta. I am mad for you. Do let me marry you and call you my very own."

Shakuntalā said gently: "O king, await my father's return. He will give me in marriage, following the rites of the scriptures." But King Duṣhmanta, though much older and wiser than Shakuntalā, in whose virgin heart love awoke for the first time, lost all control over himself and entreated her to marry him immediately, following the *gāndharva* rite consisting of mutual choice. He said: "As both of us belong to the royal race and each desires the other, we could, following the *gāndharva* rite, unite in sacred wedlock even in the absence of your father. You can, according to law, dispose of yourself."[28]

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[26] 205. 47.

[27] Parvan 1, chs. 69-74.

What could poor, innocent Shakuntalā do! Love had entered her heart, and reason bade good-bye. Yet she was self-possessed enough to make this reply: "If what you say is sanctioned by the scriptures, and if I am indeed my own disposer, promise, O king, to grant the boons I ask for. The son born of this wedlock shall become your heir-apparent and later on the rightful heir to the throne. I shall indeed marry you if you promise to grant these boons."[29]

It never entered her pure soul that any promises made by the king in the absence of a witness might later be denied. Dushmanta was so eager to call this lovely vision his own that he at once said: "I promise what you ask." He further promised to take her to his capital in a right royal style. The marriage took place according to the *gāndharva* rite. Shakuntalā bashfully surrendered herself to the loving embrace of her husband. Dushmanta did not wait till the return of the sage, but left the hermitage assuring Shakuntalā that he would send his mighty troops to escort her to his capital.

Maharshi (the great seer) Kaṇwa returned soon after the king's departure. Every day Shakuntalā ran to embrace him, who was both a father and a mother to her. That day, however, she hid herself and could not come forward to greet him. But the sage, learning all through his spiritual power, blessed her and addressed her thus:

"O my gentle daughter, your union with a man in secret without consulting me is permitted by religious laws. For the warrior race, when each desires the other, marriage according to the *gāndharva* rite is the best, even when done secretly and without pronouncing the *mantras* (sacred texts)."[30]

Shakuntalā then approached her father, and taking down the heavy basket of fruits, lovingly washed his feet and made him sit down and rest. Then she shyly spoke to him on behalf of her husband: "My father, be gracious to Dushmanta, the best among men, whom I have accepted as my husband, as also to his ministers."[31]

[28] 73. 7. [29] 73. 15-7. [30] 73. 26-7. [31] 73. 32.

Kaṇwa said: "O lovely one, I am pleased with what you have done. Now, O beauteous one, ask for the boon which you desire most."[32]

Shakuntalā's love for her husband was so great that she never thought of herself, but asked this boon for her husband and his descendants that the monarchs of the Paurava dynasty might ever be virtuous and never be deprived of their throne.

In course of time Shakuntalā gave birth to a boy of fine physique. For six long years she stayed in that forest with her hermit father, but so pure-souled was she that she never doubted Duṣhmanta's words or blamed him for not sending that army to escort her to his kingdom.

Her child brought up in the hermitage, showed promise of unusual strength. At the age of six, he would catch hold of wild beasts and treat them like domestic animals. With his extraordinary energy and fearlessness he looked as if he was born with the stamp of a great emperor. Aptly he was called Sarvadamana, all-tamer. How lovingly Shakuntalā brought him up, and how proud she felt of him! Kaṇwa affectionately watched over this gifted child, and took charge of his education, so that he might one day be an ideal emperor.

After some years he told Shakuntalā that the time had come for the installation of her son as the crown prince. He commanded a disciple to escort Shakuntalā with her son to the home of her husband. "Married women," said he, "should not long reside with their parental relations, for it speaks ill of their reputation and their virtues."[33]

Shakuntalā tenderly took leave of the sage, one half of her heart heavy at the separation, and the other half longing to unite with her husband. With her son she entered the king's resplendent court when he was giving audience. The disciple introduced her and left for the hermitage. Lovingly and respectfully she approached the king and said: "This is your son, O king, proclaim him as your heir-apparent. This child of yours, O king, is equal to a celestial and belongs to both you and me. Call to your mind the agreement you made before you married me at the asylum of Kaṇwa, and fulfil it, O blessed one."[34]

She could never imagine what awaited her. The worldly-wise king remembered everything, and yet so anxious was he for his own reputation that he intentionally insulted his lawful wife, who was the mother of his son. Like a bolt from the blue came the curt reply of the king: "O wicked woman in the garb of an ascetic, I do not remember having made any contact with you—legally, financially, or out of love. Go or stay, whichever pleases you."[35] These cruel words of her husband hurt this modest ascetic girl so terribly that she seemed to lose all consciousness and stood as if turned to a wooden image.[36] For a time her wrath flared up, but she controlled her passion with supreme strength of mind, gained through her spiritual power.[37] And she spoke to her husband thus:

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[32] 73. 33.

[33] 74. 12.

[34] 74. 17-8.

"You recognize me well, O king, and yet you deny the truth like a low-born soul. Your own heart is a witness to the truth. So please do not degrade yourself, but tell the truth.[38] He who commits a sin thinks none will know. But the sinner is known to the gods and by Him who resides in our heart.[39] I am your devoted wife. Please do not insult me because I have come of my own accord. As your wife I deserve to be treated respectfully, and yet you do not.[40] The husband enters the wife's body and is again born as a child. That is why scholars well versed in the scriptures call her a *jāyā*.[41] She is a true wife who is expert in domestic duties; she is a true wife who has borne children; she is a true wife who is devoted to her lord; she is a true wife who knows none but her husband. The wife is a man's half; she is the best of friends; she is the root of one's three coveted aims; she is the root of salvation.[42] The wife who speaks sweetly on occasions of festival is a real friend. A true wife is like a father when religious rites are performed, and like a mother in hours of sickness and woe.[43] A man is born as a son in the body of his wife. Hence a man should respect his wife as his own mother.[44] Because the son saves the souls of the ancestors from the hell called Put, he has been called *putra* by Brahmā (the Creator). Why then, O king, are you treating with indifference such a son who has come to you himself and is longingly looking at you?[45] Even ants support their eggs and do not destroy them. Then why should you not, virtuous that you are, support your own child?[46] This boy has sprung from you. Behold yourself in this son of yours as you see your own image in a clear lake. If you forsake me, I shall go back to my own hermitage. But do not forsake this child, who is your own."[47]

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[35] 74. 19-20.
[36] 74. 21.
[37] 74. 23.
[38] 74. 25-6.
[39] 74. 29.
[40] 74. 34.
[41] 74. 37.
[42] 74. 40-1.
[43] 74. 43.
[44] 74. 48.
[45] 74. 39, 54.
[46] 74. 55.

The spirited reply of this sinless woman, brought up in the forest, still seems to echo through the endless space of time. She pleaded not for herself, but for her son. But the heart of Duṣhmanta was proof against all noble sentiments. He said: "O Shakuntalā, I do not know that I begot a son and you are his mother. Who will believe women, who as a rule are tale-tellers? Your mother, the cruel-hearted Menakā, left you in the protection of wild birds, and your father was the profligate Vishwāmitra. Are you not ashamed of proclaiming yourself as the progeny of these two? I do not know you. Take yourself hence."[48]

We can well imagine how these cruel, false words of the king hurt Shakuntalā. But with supreme effort she controlled herself, knowing fully that a curse uttered by her would crush Duṣhmanta, and replied:

"O king, you see the faults of others even if they are as small as mustard seeds, but are blind to your own faults that are as big as a *bilwa* fruit. Menakā belongs to the celestial world; indeed she is considered the first of the celestial maidens. My birth, therefore, O Duṣhmanta, is much superior to yours. You walk upon the earth and I roam in the sky. The difference between ourselves is that between a mustard seed and a mountain.[49] Even atheists annoyed with those who have deviated from the path of truth and virtue are like angry venomous snakes. How shall I who am nurtured in faith express the degree of my anger? He who, after begetting a son who is his own image, forsakes him, never attains what he desires most, and the gods destroy all his good luck and possessions.[50] A hundred horse sacrifices were once weighed with truth. Truth was found heavier than the hundred sacrifices.[51] O king, God Himself is truth, and truth is the highest vow. Therefore, O king, do not violate your pledge, but embrace the truth. If you care for untruth and do not trust my words, I shall of my own accord leave your presence. I think your company should be avoided. But remember, Duṣhmanta, when you are gone, this son of mine shall rule the earth bounded by the four seas and crowned with the highest of mountains!"[52] With these words, which came straight from the heart of an innocent wife hurt mortally, Shakuntalā left the palace.

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[47] 74. 65. [48] 74. 73-7. [49] 74. 82-4. [50] 74. 96-7. [51] 74. 103.

The august assembly remained speechless. King Duṣhmanta also flushed with shame and thwarted pride, and sat as if hypnotized. None had the courage to stand up and ask a question of the king, when lo! there came a voice from heaven: "O Duṣhmanta, cherish your son. Do not insult Shakuntalā; she spoke the truth. You are the father of this boy. Let him be called Bharata, since you should cherish him, as asked by us."[53]

The king seemed to awake from the stupor into which he had fallen, and with the semblance of a righteous man he addressed his court: "You have all heard what the heavenly messenger uttered. I too know him to be my son. But had I accepted him on the strength of Shakuntalā's words alone, my people might have doubted about the parentage of my innocent son."[54]

He then welcomed his son, fondly embraced him and gave him a father's blessings. The priests rose in a body, blessed the prince and proclaimed him as the heir-apparent.

Shakuntalā was brought back to the court with due respect. Duṣhmanta offered her a belated welcome, saying rather haltingly: "O goddess, there was no witness when our marriage took place. My people might think that we were not lawfully wedded, and that this son of ours was born in sin. So they would hardly welcome him as the heir to the throne. Darling, I have forgiven all the harsh words you uttered."

Proud yet gentle Shakuntalā, perfect in dignity and submissiveness, pardoned her husband.

6. LOPĀMUDRĀ[55]

Bhagavān Agastya, who had taken the vows of celibacy and poverty, once saw his ancestors hanging in a hole with their heads down and about to fall into that terrible hell where the souls of the childless go. As he was then the only surviving descendant of the family, they begged of him to break his first vow and have a son who would carry on the name of the family. Agastya promised, but could not find a maiden who would gladly renounce all worldly pleasures for his sake, welcome a life of severe austerity in the forest and be a suitable partner in his spiritual as well as worldly duties. So he created a lovely maiden, taking the best from all beings, and gave her to the king of Vidarbha, who was praying for a child. The royal couple, delighted with this gift, thanked the sage and respectfully invited holy priests to bless the child. They came, blessed her and named her Lopāmudrā.

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[52] 74. 106-8.

[53] 74. 111-2, 114-5.

[54] 74. 116-8.

[55] Parvan 3, chs. 96-8.

Princess Lopāmudrā attained her girlhood. Her beauty was enhanced with age, and she showed signs of unusual intelligence and goodness. Her parents gave her the best cultural education. Although she outshone the princesses of her time, the sons of royal houses dared not approach her for fear of the sage Agastya, who had created her to be his wife. Her father appointed a hundred maids of honour for her. Although surrounded with so much pomp and pleasure, she worshipped her parents and attended to all their needs ; she also nursed the poor in sickness and was kind to all the inmates of the palace.

Her parents were very proud of her and were anxious to give her in marriage to a suitable bridegroom who could provide a happy and comfortable home for her. But when the sage Agastya saw that Lopāmudrā had attained the age of marriage, "he came and asked for her hand, so that he might be the father of a son."[56]

The king almost fell into a swoon when he heard that the hoary-headed sage really meant to marry his beautiful girl, whom he had brought up in the midst of luxuries. He treated Agastya with due respect and went to consult his queen. She also was thunderstruck. When they reflected on how mismatched the pair would be, they could not utter a word. Yet they dared not refuse the sage, whose curse might blow out the life of their only child.

Princess Lopāmudrā came to know about it and saw her parents. When she found them so downhearted, she could not stand it and said: "O king, do not grieve on my account. O father, please marry me to Agastya and save yourself."[57]

The king and queen got up, embraced their daughter and blessed her. Seeing her mother weeping piteously, Lopāmudrā put her arms round her neck and said: "Dearest mother, it breaks my heart to see you so unhappy. Believe me, I shall be as happy with my old husband as you are with my father."

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[56] 97. 1-2.

[57] 97. 6.

Hearing these words of consolation from her, the royal couple controlled their feelings and made arrangements for the marriage. As soon as the ceremony was over, Agastya approached his young wife and said: "As you are the wife of a poor sage and are going to live with me in my lowly thatched cottage in the forest, please discard all your precious dresses and ornaments, dress yourself as befits your new position and come with me." There were wailings and protestations from her friends, but Lopāmudrā quietly went to her apartment and came out dressed in bark and deerskin, the same as was worn by her husband. In this simple, sacred dress she looked so sweet, so pure and yet so dignified that all looked at her in silent astonishment. She bowed to her parents, embraced her mother and, bidding good-bye to her friends and attendants, left the happy home of her childhood.

Not a single article of luxury did she take with her, nor did she once pause to think that she was the rightful heiress to the kingdom of Vidarbha. Her eyes were full of tears at the thought of her aged parents, whom she was leaving when they required her services most; yet a happiness shone through her tears, for she suddenly realized that she loved her husband, wrinkled and penniless though he was, far more deeply than she had ever done anybody else.

The couple spent their days happily in the hermitage. Lopāmudrā rose with the dawn, performed all her domestic duties single-handed and taking her bath waited for her husband. Husband and wife often sat side by side before the sacred fire and meditated on the Lord. So perfect was their union that Princess Lopāmudrā lost her whole entity in that of her husband.

Then they thought of their duties towards their ancestors. Agastya was the only living descendant of his family, and Lopāmudrā the only child of her parents. It was now time for them to have a child who would perpetuate the names of both the families and make offerings to the souls of their ancestors. When Agastya approached Lopāmudrā with this proposal, she blushed and said modestly: "My beloved husband, I shall feel the happiest and the proudest of women to have a child who will belong to both of us. But while leaving home, I renounced all luxuries and put on this hermit's dress. I consider this hermitage of ours to be superior to the abode of worldlings, and this sacred dress of mine to befit something where the desire for a child has no room. The husband no doubt weds a wife for offspring. But, O great sage, your love for me must be as deep as mine for you, and our nuptial bed must be as comfortable as I had in the palace of my father.[58] We must both be decked in garlands and ornaments according to fancy. Otherwise I cannot approach you in this ascetic dress. O great ascetic, this dress of mine must not be polluted in any way!"

Poor Agastya! he could hardly believe his own ears. Was this the sweet maiden who had married him of her own free will and followed him dressed like a mendicant? Was this the austere wife who carried out the least of his wishes and never protested? Yet so dearly did he love his wife that he could not get angry, but said sadly: "Darling, you have no more any wealth and I too am but a poor hermit. How can I get the costly things to which you were used in your father's palace?"

Lopāmudrā replied: "O sage, through your ascetic power you have become so powerful that in a moment you can bring every treasure which belongs to the men of the world."[59]

But Agastya was not to be tempted. Slowly he answered: "Yes, what you say is true. But it will fritter away my penance. Oh, suggest some other way which will not interfere with my spiritual life."[60]

Lopāmudrā realized the superiority of her husband and bowed down to it. She left it to him to do whatever he thought best.

Agastya went to three kings one after another and asked them to give him enough money for his needs without getting themselves into debt and without forcing the sum from anybody else. The kings showed their budgets, and Agastya saw that their income and expenditure were on a par. Hence he did not take any money from them, but went to Ilwala, the king of the demons, who was immensely rich and had to oblige him. Agastya gave Lopāmudrā enough wealth to make such preparations for the child to be born as she wanted. To test her, however, he asked her: "Would you have a thousand sons, or a hundred sons each equal to ten, or ten sons each equal to a hundred, or just one son superior to a thousand?"[61]

Lopāmudrā understood her husband perfectly well. So she replied: "O sage, let me have just one son equal to a thousand. One learned and honest son is far superior to many dishonest ones."[62]

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[58] 97. 16-9. [59] 97. 21. [60] 97. 22. [61] 99. 21.

Their perfect union bore a son—the great poet Dṛiḍhasyu, who made the lives of his parents a blessing.

7. SULABHĀ[63]

Dharmadhwaja Janaka, king of Mithilā, well conversant with the highly philosophical doctrines contained in the Vedas and a master of the scriptures bearing on the duties of a king, devoted himself to the practice of yoga, and although he ruled a kingdom and performed all the duties of a king, father and husband, he lived the life of one truly emancipated.

In the same age, there lived an extremely virtuous, mendicant woman named Sulabhā, who was the daughter of the saintly king Pradhāna, and who did not marry because there was no bridegroom worthy of her. She practised the doctrines of yoga and attained that stage of supreme realization in which the finite individual soul becomes one with the infinite universal soul.

She travelled widely, and wherever she went, she heard praises of the unique attainments of King Dharmadhwaja. To test the degree of his spiritual eminence and to profit by his superior psychic experiences, if any, she assumed the form of a charming young woman dressed as a mendicant and visited the king in his royal court. The king, much impressed by her quiet dignity, welcomed her as an honoured guest. "Sulabhā, who was an adept in yoga, entered the intellect of the king through her own intellect, and controlling the rays of light issuing from his eyes by those emanating from hers, bound up the king with yogic bonds with a view to ascertaining the truth."[64]

The outer frames of both the yogis remained stationary, but soul spoke to soul unheard by mortal ears. "O holy lady," the king asked, "where have you come from, whom do you belong to, to what course of conduct are you devoted, and where will you go from here?[65] Please understand that although I hold my royal emblems, I am really free from attachment to them. I wish to know you thoroughly, for I regard you as deserving respect."[66]

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[62] 99. 22.

[63] Parvan 12, ch. 320.

[64] 320. 16-7.

[65] 320. 20.

[66] 320. 22.

The king introduced himself as the beloved disciple of the venerable mendicant Pañchashikha, of Parāshara's line, from whom he had learnt the Sāṁkhya and Yoga systems of philosophy, showing the paths to emancipation. "But," said he, "my preceptor did not command me to give up my kingdom. Following his advice, I rule my subjects, and yet, free from all attachments and communing with the Supreme Brahman, I live virtually alone. Renunciation is the highest means for attaining emancipation ; it flows from knowledge, from which is born the endeavour after yoga, and yoga leads to the realization of the Self, which enables us to transcend pleasure and pain. Perfection consists in going beyond the conditions of the body. Even in this life I have transcended all attachments.[67] I do not feel attachment to my wife, nor do I hate my foes who bear hatred towards me. I look equally on a person who anoints my right arm with sandal paste, and one who severs my left arm. I keep aloof from both love and hatred, since I know how fruitless both are.[68]

"My venerable preceptor taught me that if a householder practises *yama* and *niyama* (primary and secondary moral observances), he becomes a monk. If on the other hand a monk suffers from the weaknesses of mortals, he becomes a householder.[69] The ochre cloth, shaven head, triple staff and water-pot are but outward signs and can in no way help to attain emancipation.[70] Emancipation does not lie in poverty nor bondage in its opposite. Whether rich or poor, knowledge of the Self alone leads one to emancipation. The snare of royal splendours and the bondage of dear ones I have cut off with the sword of renunciation sharpened on the hone of knowledge.[71]

"O lady, using your psychic power you have entered my body. This action of yours does not befit your garb. Now tell me at whose instance you have entered my kingdom and my city and, above all, penetrated into my heart. There cannot possibly be a union between us. You are a mendicant who has renounced everything, and I am a king who leads a householder's life. You are a Brāhmaṇa, and I am a Kṣhatriya. Further, if you are married, a union between us would be unlawful.[72]

"Drunk with pride in your psychic power and jealous at the sight of my superiority, you have caused a union between your intellect and mine, which is obnoxious.[73] You have found out whether I have attained emancipation or not. So do not conceal your real motive, for deceitfulness is a death to success. Please let me know the order you belong to, your attainments, your mode of life, your attitude and your object in coming to me."[74]

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[67] 320. 27-31.

[68] 320. 34-5.

[69] 320. 41.

[70] 320. 47.

[71] 320. 50-2.

[72] 320. 58-60.

Although rebuked by the king in these unpleasant and unseemly words, Sulabhā was not at all shaken. The lovely lady replied to the king in nicer words. Her reply, which was lengthy, is remarkable for its depth of thought as well as for its range of subjects. Only a few bits of it are presented here.

"O king," said she, "speech should be free from eighteen faults and possessed of eighteen merits.[75] The words I utter will be consistent, concise, agreeable, unambiguous, truthful, conducive to human ends and free from vulgarity. They will be comprehensive, simple, easy-flowing, reasonable and useful. I shall not tell you anything prompted by desire, wrath, fear, greed, self-pity, shame, compassion or pride. So it behoves you to listen to me.[76]

"You asked me who I am, whence I come, and so on. To these I reply: As lac and wood, grains of dust and drops of water are commingled with each other, so are creatures born in this world. Although sound, touch, taste, colour, scent and the five organs are diverse in themselves, yet they exist commingled in the body like lac and wood. Being insentient, they never ask each other who you are and so on. The eye cannot see itself, and the ear cannot hear itself, nor can the organs know one another.[77]

"In every body there are thirty principles. Some hold that the unmanifest Prakṛiti is the cause of these thirty principles; others hold that manifest atoms, etc. are the cause. The unmanifest Prakṛiti, which is manifest as the above principles, is the cause of all creation. O king, myself and yourself and all others endowed with bodies are the creations of Prakṛiti.[78]

"The constituents of the body undergo change every moment and are so minute that none can realize their change. New particles are every minute replacing the decayed ones, but as in the case of a lamp flame, this constant change is not noticed. When the body is thus changing incessantly, can you ask who I am, whose I am, and where I come from?[79]

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[73] 320. 68-9.
[74] 320. 74-5.
[75] 320. 78.
[76] 320. 88-90.
[77] 320. 95-9.
[78] 320. 110-4.

"As you see yourself in your own body with your intellect, even so why do you not see yourself in the bodies of others with your own intellect?[80] You are, I say, unworthy of true emancipation, because unlike a true emancipated soul, you are attached to your worldly enjoyments such as eating, sleeping and dressing.[81]

"I entered your mind through my psychic power, but I have no real connection with you, nor have I endeavoured to bring about a physical union. If you have really freed yourself from all worldly bonds, what harm have I done by entering your body with my intellect alone? When I have no real connection even with my own body, how can I possibly have any contact with yours?[82] Your intellect must be empty of true knowledge; otherwise, if you are truly emancipated, why do you dread a union, when you know that there is no difference between a soul and a soul?

"I do not say all this to glorify myself and to humiliate you, because he is really emancipated who never indulges in an intellectual duel, but remains tranquil in Brahman, which is eternal Peace. A mendicant resides for one night in an empty house and leaves it the next morning. So for this one night I shall reside in you. I am pleased with your hospitality and the talk I had with you. Having slept overnight, I shall depart tomorrow."[83]

The king of Mithilā, renowned everywhere for his scholarship, superior intellect, wisdom and asceticism, realized the spiritual superiority of Sulabhā and the truth and excellence of her words, and kept silent.

8. VIDURĀ[84]

The story of the queen mother Vidurā is remarkable as presenting the true spirit of a Kṣhatriya—never to acknowledge defeat, but to fight on. We do not know if she ever lived, but the unconquerable spirit of this far-sighted, gifted queen, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata*, still wins our admiration and reverence. A mother she was, but her love was not that of a common mother: it was the love of a queen for her princely son born to rule a kingdom.

[79] 320. 120-1.

[80] 320. 125.

[81] 320. 131-3.

[82] 320. 166-8.

[83] 133. 187-9.

[84] Parvan 5, chs. 133-6.

Her son King Sañjaya, defeated in a battle by the king of Sindhu, lost heart, and returning home was lying in his own apartment, shedding tears like a child. But Vidurā had no sympathy for such effeminacy, no patience for such cowardice. So, highly enraged, she reproached her son thus:

"O unworthy son of mine, O enhancer of the delight of enemies, I think you have come from a place unknown, and you are no son of mine nor of my husband.[85] Do not disgrace yourself, do not remain satisfied with a little, set your heart on your own welfare and do not be afraid. Get up, O coward, do not take defeat lying down. Let not your enemies delight and your friends grieve over your fall.[86] It is better to court death in plucking the fangs of a snake than die like a miserable dog. Fight bravely even at the risk of your life.[87] Far better it is to flare up even for a moment than go on smoking for ever. Let none born of royal blood be a mild ass.[88] O my son, either show your valour or court the way to death. For indifferent to your duties that you are, there is no need for you to live."[89]

Yet King Sañjaya could not command enough courage to face the horrors of the battle-field. So he appealed to the tenderest spot of his mother's heart: "Mother, of what use will be your ornaments, your enjoyments, nay the whole earth and life itself, if you see me no more?"[90] But Vidurā was not to be hoodwinked. Rather, like a skilled physician, she was determined to hurt her son a little so as to cure him of a sickness that endangered his very life. So she said: "O Sañjaya, the life of that man is indeed worth living on whom all depend for their maintenance, as birds go to a tree laden with ripe fruits. Blessed is his life whose valour makes his friends prosper with ease, as the gods do from Indra, their chief. The man who lives in greatness, depending on the prowess of his own arms, wins fame in this world and access to heaven in the next.[91] By name you are Sañjaya, the conqueror, but I do not find any sign of that in you. O my son, be true to your name, do not make your name untrue. A highly learned Brāhmaṇa possessed of great foresight saw you once when you were but a child and said, 'A misfortune will befall him, but he will again attain greatness.' Remembering his words,

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[85] 133. 5.
[86] 133. 7-8.
[87] 133. 10.
[88] 133. 15.
[89] 133. 18.
[90] 133. 39.
[91] 133. 43-5.

I hope for your victory. So, my son, I speak to you thus and shall go on speaking again and again."[92]

When she saw that hope was dawning in the mind of her son, she reminded him of her exalted position when his father had lived. Slowly she insinuated that bereaved of her husband, she was but a dependant on her son. Would he fail his mother in her old age? Would he fail his beloved wife and drag her down to the position of a slave? "Born of a noble family," she said, "I came here as from one lake to another. Adored by my husband, I was a real queen, bringing blessings to all. When you see me and your wife extremely weakened, you will, I am sure, O Sañjaya, scarcely desire to live.[93] You are like a ship to us to carry us over this ocean, hard to cross. Make the impossibe possible, make room for us where there is no room, bringing back life to us, for we are as good as dead."[94]

Well versed in human psychology, she tried to rouse her son's pride in his royal birth saying: "O king, slay your foes in battle and thus observe your duties."[95] Then she attacked the weakest spot in his heart and said: "As before, enjoy the company of the daughters of Sauvīra, and do not, like a weakling, be a slave to the daughters of Sindhu."[96] She asked him not to forget himself, because it would break her heart. She said: "What peace may my heart know, if I see you walking behind others? Never did any one born in this race walk submissively behind others."[97]

Yet so hard it is for a slothful coward to conquer his weakness that he tried once more to soften her motherly heart by saying: "O my cruel mother, thinking highly of martial heroism, I think your heart has hardened into steel. Fie on the customs of warriors! You are my own mother, and yet you are inducing me to join battle and are speaking to me, your only son, as if you were no mother of mine."[98]

But this mother of mothers knew her task well. She knew that it was a question of now or never. So she said: "The hour for action has come. If you do not do your duty but display softness, you will be disrespected by the people. And if I do not warn you against this impending ill fame, I shall not be acting like a true mother.[99] The meanest among men, who refrain from doing good work and engage in evil work, never attain real happiness either in this world or in the next."[100]

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[92] 134. 7-9.
[93] 134. 14-6.
[94] 134. 21.
[95] 134. 30.
[96] 134. 32.
[97] 134. 35.
[98] 135. 1-3.
[99] 135. 6-7.

Sañjaya could not stand the rebuke of his mother any more and pleaded for mercy. But the mother was adamant and told him that she would be proud of him and respect him when he would fight bravely and snatch his kingdom from the hands of his enemies. Still the son spoke of one more difficulty: "How can I expect victory when I have neither wealth nor allies? So, like a sinner who has no hope of heaven, I have given up my desire for kingdom." But he promised that if she could help him out of this dilemma, he would do her bidding.[101]

Vidurā had foresight enough to make provision for this. She said: "We have a vast amount of treasure unknown to you or anybody else. I know where it is, and I shall place it at your disposal. And, O Sañjaya, O hero, you still have many friends who are proof against pleasure or pain, and who never turn away from a battle. Besides, amongst the foes there are many who can be won over by courtesy, by respect and by offers of friendship; there are innumerable fortune-hunters who can be bribed to join your side; there are some who are jealous of others holding a higher position, and who would desert their present master to better their position and to take revenge. Thus you can strengthen your own army and weaken your enemy's, if once you make up your mind to fight for victory."[102]

Vidurā's highly spirited words of wisdom penetrated the king's dull intellect and strengthened him. He rose to the occasion and proudly agreed to obey his mother.

One might wonder why this great queen did not take the reins of the state into her own hands instead of wasting her time on her worthless son. But Vidurā the queen had died with her husband, the late king of Sauvīra. She lived only as a mother, and her thoughts concerned only her son and his welfare.

9. Damayantī[103]

Nala, the king of Nishadha, was a brave, handsome young man well versed in the science of war and unusually skilled in driving chariots. He held an exalted position among all the ruling princes, and his name and fame echoed throughout Bhārata. He had but one weakness—he was very fond of gambling.

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[100] 135. 13.
[101] 135. 22-4.
[102] 136. 8-12.
[103] Parvan 3, chs. 52-79.

There was another king, Bhīma, ruling over Vidarbha, who was known for his heroism and his affection for his subjects. He had three sons and an exceedingly beautiful daughter, Damayantī.

Royal heralds, who roamed from court to court, sang the praises of Princess Damayantī to King Nala and of Nala in the court of Bhīma, which Damayantī often attended. So Nala and Damayantī fell in love with each other. Nala, unable to control himself, began to live all alone in the garden attached to the royal apartments. There one day he saw a flock of beautiful swans with golden wings and caught one of them. The swan somehow discovered the secret of his soul and said to him: "O king, do not kill me. I shall go to Damayantī and so speak to her of you that she will not care to marry any other man."[104] Nala released the bird and waited in breathless suspense for the result of its mission.

The whole flock alighted in the royal garden at Vidarbha where the princess was sporting with her friends. The young ladies were so delighted at the unusual sight of golden-winged swans that they ran after them. One of the swans cunningly led Damayantī to a corner of the garden and, to her surprise, addressed her like a human being: "O Damayantī, there is a king of Niṣhadha named Nala. Your beauty, nay your very life, would be blessed if you could be his wife. You are a jewel among women, and Nala is the greatest of men."[105]

The princess blushed; then she asked the swan to go to Nala and speak to him. Damayantī could no longer hide her love, which manifested in the usual symptoms. When these were reported to the king, he divined their cause aright and made preparations for a *swayaṁvara-sabhā* or an assembly of suitors so that the princess might choose her own husband. Such was her fame that not only kings and princes with gorgeous retinues attended the assembly, but even celestial beings came seeking her hand.

Indra, the king of the gods, Agni (the fire-god), Yama (the god of death), Varuṇa (the king of the seas) met King Nala on their way to King Bhīma's court and asked him to do them a favour. When he agreed, they requested him to appeal on their behalf to Damayantī

[104] 53. 20-1.

[105] 53. 27-30.

so that she might choose one of them as her husband. Nala, who was very truthful, had to promise. With the help of the gods, he entered the apartment of Damayantī unseen by the guards and saw her surrounded by other maidens.

Though, at the sight of her, Nala's love for her increased a thousand-fold, yet he kept his feelings under control. Princess Damayantī came forward and asked him smilingly who he was. Nala said: "O blessed one, know me to be Nala, come here as the messenger of the gods. O lovely lady, Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Yama all seek your hand. They have sent me to request you to choose one of them as your husband. But, O gentle lady, do as you please."[106]

Damayantī did not take a minute to make her decision. Saluting the gods, she replied to Nala, laughing: "O king, love me and command me what I may do for you. Myself and all I have are yours. Won't you love me in return?"[107]

Poor Nala! Yet he tried to be true to his promise and asked her: "Why do you desire for a mere man when the gods are seeking your hand?"[108] Tears ran down the cheeks of Damayantī to hear these cruel words spoken by Nala. "I bow to the gods," she said, "but, O king, I tell you truly, I have chosen you as my husband."[109] This straightforward answer of Damayantī embarrassed Nala, who asked her so to act as would harmonize her desire with his mission. Thereupon the cool-headed Damayantī replied: "O king, I see a way by which no blame will attach to you. Do come to the marriage assembly along with Indra and the other gods. In their presence I shall choose you, O best of men, as my husband. And hence none will be able to find fault with you."[110]

Before the great assembly of kings, at the appointed hour, the princess was ushered in. The kings present were described to her one by one. She advanced gracefully, bowing to the kings as their names were proclaimed until the name of Nala was announced, when she stopped and looked up. But, to her bewilderment, she saw five Nalas seated on splendid thrones, all looking alike! She realized that it was the four celestial seekers of her hand who had also assumed the form of Nala. She thereupon bowed to the gods with folded hands and tremblingly said: "From the moment I listened to the

[106] 55. 22-3, 25. [107] 56. 1-2. [108] 56. 5. [109] 56. 13-4. [110] 56. 19-21.

swan, I have accepted the king of Niṣhadha as my husband. That I may be true to myself, may the gods reveal him to me! Since I took the vow of adoring none but Nala, may the gods reveal him to me!"[111]

All of a sudden she saw that out of the five Nalas there were four who were resplendent and stood without touching the ground, and by their side there stood the real Nala, showing opposite characteristics. With gratitude she bowed to the gods, joyously came forward and placed the garland of flowers on Nala's neck.

Happily the couple spent their years of matrimony. But there came a time when King Nala, under the influence of Kali, lord of the Iron Age, under whom evil prospers and virtue suffers, was induced to play at dice with his wicked brother Puṣhkara. Forgotten were his royal duties towards his subjects, his son and daughter and his devoted queen. He gambled away almost the whole of his wealth. All the pleadings of his ministers and queen were in vain. At this Damayantī was much hurt. Yet she did not lose heart. She was determined to do what was best for Nala and their children. She sent the latter to her father's home. Nala still went on gambling. When he lost his kingdom, Puṣhkara said with a sneer: "Well, let the play go on. You still have Damayantī, the loveliest of women!" A shudder passed through the body of Nala. The name of Damayantī uttered so flippantly broke the spell, and with a withering glance at his brother, he got up, threw away his crown and, changing his royal robe for a piece of cloth, left the palace barefooted. Damayantī, also dressed in one piece of cloth, accompanied him.

For three nights the royal couple halted outside the city gate, but none cared to offer them food and water. Like a shadow, Damayantī followed her lord. Smitten by hunger and thirst, they went to the forest. There Nala saw some birds with wings shining like gold. Mad with hunger and the desire to possess something valuable, he took away his only cloth and, before Damayantī could stop him, threw it over the birds. In the twinkling of an eye, the birds were on their wings, leaving Nala naked and trembling.

Damayantī offered Nala half her cloth and tried to console him. Nala again and again showed her the road that led to her father's

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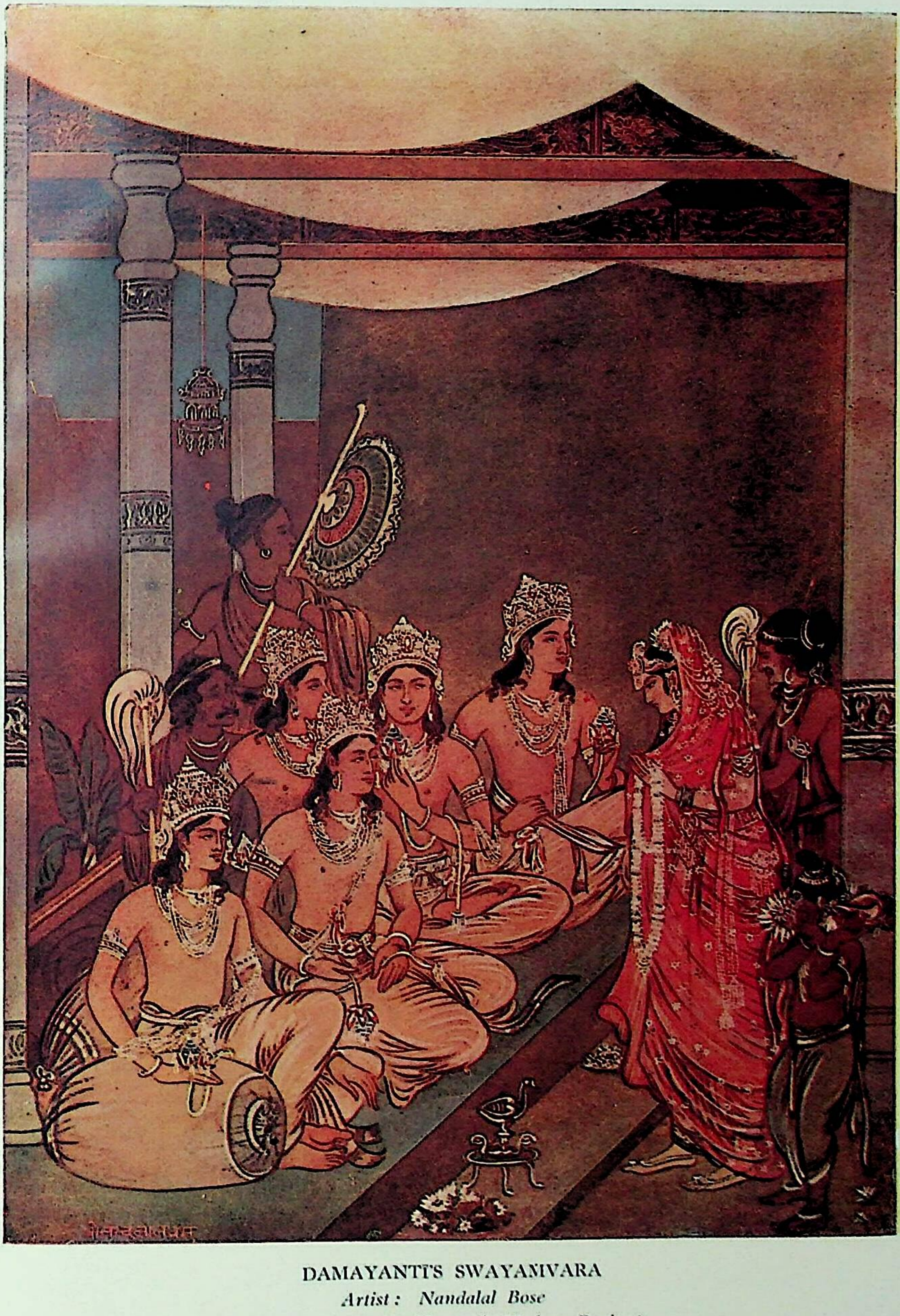
[111] 57. 17, 19-20.



DAMAYANTI'S SWAYAMVARA
Artist : Nandalal Bose
Courtesy : K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review)

kingdom. But at this Damayantī, in a voice choked with sobs, said: "How can I leave you when you have lost your kingdom, lost everything, are naked and are worn with hunger and toil? In these wild woods, when you are tired and hungry and your heart turns to the thought of former happiness, it is I who shall soothe your weariness, O my king. I tell you truly that, according to physicians, in sorrow there is no physic equal to a wife."[112]

When Nala said he was not leaving her, she replied: "O great king, if you do not intend to leave me, then why do you point out to me the road that leads to Vidarbha? If you really want me to live with my people, then let us go together. I know the king of Vidarbha will receive you with love and honour, and you will live there happily."[113]

King Nala could not bear the idea of going to King Bhīma, especially when he had lost everything through his own foolhardiness. Sharing the same piece of cloth, husband and wife lay side by side. Damayantī was thankful for the good luck which kept her husband near her, and meant to keep watch over him throughout the night. But her tired body refused to obey her, and she fell fast asleep. In the meantime, Nala, goaded by Kali, woke up. Thousands of plans for the future rushed through his mind. Of one thing he was sure: he could not possibly drag his queen along with him in that stage. He argued that, left to herself, she would be able to find her father's home and there live comfortably, if not happily. Reunion with their children would help her to bear the pangs of separation from him.

But how could he go away naked! He could not tear the piece of cloth which he shared with his wife, fearing it might wake her. Suddenly he saw a sword lying on the ground. Like a demented person he took it up, severed the garment in two and ran away, forsaking his wife in that forest. But such was the great love between the couple that he returned again and again to have a last look at his wife. Finally he broke away.

When Damayantī awoke, she found herself alone in that forest. Beside herself with fear and anxiety for her husband, she called out again and again. Grief turned her mind, and she imagined she saw Nala hiding himself behind the trees and shrubs, and like one insane she darted here and there and rent the skies with her shrieks till she sank down in stupor. Regaining consciousness, she called Nala by all the names her heart loved to call him by but never uttered through shyness. Not for once did this true wife blame her husband for deserting her in that forest.

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[112] 61. 27-9.

[113] 61. 32, 35-6.

She was going on in this distracted mood for a long time, when suddenly she saw a peaceful hermitage. How refreshing it looked! She saw the venerable ascetics sitting in their rustic cottages. They welcomed her like a daughter and induced her to take a little rest and refreshment. Damayantī, with her senses restored by their kindness, narrated her tale and said: "If I do not see Nala within a few days, I shall give up this body of mine and seek a better life. Life has no meaning for me forsaken by my husband, the best among men. How can I live afflicted with grief for my husband?"[114]

Her lamentations stirred the hearts of the ascetics, who said lovingly: "O blessed daughter, we see by our ascetic power that the future will bring you happiness, and that you will soon behold Nala. You will see your husband free from all sins, possessed of shining jewels, ruling over his own kingdom, punishing his enemies, comforting his well-wishers and enjoying all the choicest blessings."[115]

These sweet words assuaged her bruised heart, put new strength into her body and calmed her perturbed mind. For a moment she stopped there wrapt in a delightful sense of comfort. When she opened her eyes, however, she found that the hermitage had disappeared—it was only a vision! But the kind gods had done their work: Damayantī was saved from sheer lunacy.

While roaming clad in half a garment, pale and looking almost like a skeleton, she met a caravan of merchants resting near a ford. They permitted her to travel with them to Chedi, for which they were bound. But at night a herd of wild elephants came and killed a great many of the merchants, and being superstitious, the survivors put down all their misfortunes to the strange woman whom they had befriended. They would have molested her, had she not run away from them into the forest again. How she longed for death that would put an end to all her troubles!

Slowly and sadly she walked on and saw a broad road, following which she entered Chedi and stood by the palace gate—weary, footsore and looking like a maniac. The kind-hearted queen of Chedi saw her from the terrace and sent her nurse to bring her to her presence. Coaxed by the queen, she told her tale without mentioning any names and details. The queen was moved and appointed her a maid of honour to her daughter Sunandā. Yet Damayantī never thought of sending a messenger to her father, where she was sure to be welcome.

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[114] 64. 89-90.

[115] 64. 92, 94-5.

Nala, meanwhile, had in the course of his wanderings met one misfortune after another and lost his strength and beauty. Even his features had changed into those of a dwarf. But he did not forget his mastery in chariot-driving and took service under Ṛituparṇa, king of Ayodhyā, where his own driver Vārṣhṇeya had been employed.

Damayantī's father Bhīma, having had no news of his beloved daughter and her husband, sent Brāhmaṇa messengers all around and promised handsome rewards to any one who would bring news of them. One of these messengers, Sudeva by name, a friend of Damayantī's brother, came to Chedi and saw Princess Sunandā sitting with her maid of honour. "Never have I seen any one resembling Princess Damayantī so much," thought Sudeva, and, taking his chance, introduced himself. Damayantī could no longer control herself and wept piteously. The queen of Chedi hurried to the scene, and how happy she was to learn that she had unknowingly given shelter to her own niece—the daughter of her sister, the queen of Vidarbha! "My house is your house, and my wealth is as much yours as mine," said she to Damayantī. Princess Sunandā was delighted to have the world-renowned princess as her companion. But Damayantī could no longer stay away from her beloved children. So she bowed down to her aunt and took leave of her, thanking her for all that she had done at a very critical time.

Words fail to describe the joy of reunion between the long-lost daughter and her parents, and a loving mother and her two children of tender age. Yet for Damayantī there was no real joy till she found her husband. So next morning she said to her mother: "O mother, if you wish to see me living, do try to find Nala, the hero among men."[116] The mother understood, and with tears in her eyes she asked her husband to send messengers and find Nala.

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[116] 69. 29.

Damayantī composed a few couplets and instructed the messengers to repeat them wherever they went and bring back the answer, if any. She warned them against letting anybody guess that they were repeating the words at her command. The couplets read as follows:

"Where are you gone, O dear cheat, cutting away half of my cloth and leaving me, thy devoted wife, asleep in the forest? Poor girl, she is awaiting you in the same condition in which you saw her when you left—extremely tormented and clad in half a cloth. O king, O hero, be gracious unto her who is constantly weeping because of that woe, and say something in reply. Surely a wife should always be maintained and protected by her husband. Why, despite your being cognizant of virtue, are both those duties ignored by you? Therefore, O greatest and best of men, have pity on me, for it is from you that I have heard that compassion is the highest virtue."[117]

The messengers travelled far and near reciting those couplets, but none made any reply. Great was the suffering, but Damayantī remained true to her lord and never slackened her efforts to find him. After a long time a Brāhmaṇa named Parṇāda returned from Ayodhyā and sought an interview with Damayantī. He said: "O princess, in quest of Nala I travelled far and wide and arrived at Ayodhyā, the capital of King Ṛituparṇa. I recited the couplets in the royal court; none answered. But when I had left the court, Bāhuka, the charioteer of the king, approached me and with tears in his eyes spoke to me thus: 'Chaste women, although fallen on evil days, protect themselves by their own efforts and thus no doubt win their way forthwith to heaven. Overwhelmed with calamity and deprived of every bliss, he deserted her. So she should not be angry with him. A virtuous woman should not be angry with one whose garment was stolen by birds when he was trying to procure some food for both, and who was mentally afflicted.' "[118]

Damayantī knew that none but Nala could answer thus. So she spoke to her mother confidentially and sent for Sudeva, her brother's friend. She instructed him to go to Ayodhyā and tell King Ṛituparṇa that Damayantī, not knowing where Nala was, had decided to hold a marriage assembly the next morning, and that kings and princes were coming to it. "But you must keep it a secret from father," she said to her mother, "for Nala is the best charioteer, and none but him could cover the distance from Ayodhyā within such a short time." Her mother agreed. Such was the fame of her beauty and cultural attainments, that although she was the mother of two children, Ṛituparṇa resolved to start immediately with Bāhuka as his driver, hoping to win the hand of Damayantī. Bāhuka obeyed. Wonderful was his skill in driving the chariot. So amazed was the king that he asked to be trained in the knowledge of horses and the art of chariot-driving, promising to impart in exchange his knowledge of dice, in which he was an expert. Bāhuka gladly exchanged his knowledge for that of gambling, which he required most to recover his lost kingdom.

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[117] 69. 37-43.

[118] 70. 8-11.

When the king of Ayodhyā arrived at Vidarbha, he was surprised to see no preparations for the marriage assembly. But Damayantī's heart leapt with hope. She secretly watched the celebrated charioteer of Ayodhyā and sent her children to him. The nurse came back to report how fondly Bāhuka had embraced them, bathed in tears. But, alas, how different the dwarfish Bāhuka looked from the stately Nala! Yet Damayantī did not lose heart and secretly observed him day and night. She saw that in certain ways he behaved like Nala, but how to account for the difference in appearance! So she sent one of her maids to ask him whether he had heard the name of Nala. With his voice choked with emotion, Bāhuka answered: "Nala, disguised and robbed of his beauty, wanders about in the world. He will not disclose his secret to anybody." But the maiden asked him: "When the royal messenger roamed chanting his couplets of query, did you make any answer? If so, my mistress, Princess Damayantī, would like to hear it." Bāhuka repeated what he had said, but would not yet reveal himself.

Then the princess went to her parents and asked their permission to send for the charioteer, so that she might see him face to face and question him. Bāhuka was admitted to her apartment. There he saw her thin and pale, and dressed only in half a piece of cloth, with true love shining through her eyes. His heart was nearly broken, but he checked himself. Choking with tears, Damayantī asked: "Have you ever seen, O Bāhuka, a man who was cognizant of virtue and yet left his wife sleeping in a forest? Who but Nala of good fame could leave in the solitary woods his dear, innocent wife, overcome with fatigue?"[119] Nala, shaking with emotion, replied: "But are not the messengers of King Bhīma heralding hither and thither the message that Damayantī will choose a second husband of her own will?" Damayantī said that it was but a ruse to attract Nala, for none but him could come from Ayodhyā to Vidarbha in so short a time, and none but the king of Ayodhyā had been invited.

Nala explained how under the evil influence of Kali he had behaved like a maniac and left his wife who was to him dearer than life. He further said that the gods in their mercy had provided him with the means to get back his former physique and beauty. Nala put on a magic garment and regained his radiant form. The happiness of their reunion was indescribable. Overwhelmed with emotion, they buried themselves in each other's embrace. Nala, now an adept at dice, went to his own kingdom and challenged his false brother Pushkara to a game. The shameless Pushkara chuckled: "Ah, now I shall win Damayantī!" But at each throw of the dice Nala won, till he got back all that he had lost. He could have inflicted the cruellest punishment on Pushkara, but on the day of his reascension, he fully pardoned him.

Damayantī sat by the side of the enthroned king, and her virtues were sung by the court minstrels, as they have been sung to this day by all lovers of conjugal faith and constancy.

10. SĀVITRĪ[120]

Is there a woman born in India, with any pretensions to culture, who has not heard the name of Sāvitrī, the ideal wife? Her memory is cherished not only in every Hindu home but also by those outside the fold, while orthodox Hindu wives still fast for three days in the month of *Jyaishtha* (May-June) in her honour.

Sāvitrī was born a princess, the beloved daughter of Ashwapati, king of the Madrās. For many years the royal couple was not blessed with a child, for which they observed hard penances and performed rites. One day they were chanting the hymn to the goddess Sāvitrī according to their custom, when the deity appeared in the sacrificial fire and blessed them with the promise of a heroic daughter. In due course the child was born, whom they named Sāvitrī after the goddess. Princess Sāvitrī was brought up amid luxuries and given a liberal education. As the years passed, she grew in beauty and wisdom, gentleness and courage, and was also an adept in the performance of her varied duties. As a result of this, people of her own land and that of the adjacent countries held her in great respect. But she was so calm and dignified that the young princes of her time could not think of wooing her as a wife, and thus she remained unmarried.

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[119] 76. 10-1.

[120] Parvan 3, chs. 292-8.

One day the princess, after her bath, offered oblations at the altar, and going to her father, who sat on his throne, reverently worshipped him with flowers. The king heartily blessed his accomplished daughter and said: "My daughter, the time is ripe for giving you in marriage. Yet none has come asking me for your hand. So you choose a husband worthy of you and let me know. I shall consider and bestow you on the man on whom your choice falls."[121] With blushing cheeks, Sāvitrī bowed and left the royal presence.

Preparations were made for her to go out on a long excursion and choose a bridegroom. Escorted by her father's old counsellors as well as attendants, she left her father's palace in a golden chariot. But instead of going to the palaces of other kings, she went to the woods and visited the hermitages of the royal sages. Days and months passed in this way; yet she met none whom she could choose as her husband.

She went further and entered the dense forest. Although she felt the separation from her loving parents, yet she was compensated by the peace and charm that reigned in those regions. Once travelling thus, she saw a young man carrying an axe on his shoulder and a bundle of wood in his arm. Just for one moment the princess, so self-possessed, forgot to take her eyes off that vision. Somehow, the magic of the personality of this unknown young man captured her soul, and she realized that it was he for whom she had been waiting so long. After making proper enquiries, she returned home to tell her parents.

When she entered the royal court, there was seated Nārada, the celestial sage, along with the king's ministers. The king wanted to hear from her the name of the fortunate man on whom her choice had fallen. Sāvitrī said with emotion: "My father, there was a noble king named Dyumatsena, ruling over the Shālwa country. He had but one son. As ill luck would have it, the king became blind, and his enemies, taking advantage of this, attacked his kingdom and drove him out. The king, accompanied by his loving wife and infant son, left for the forest. There he tried to forget the world which had treated him so cruelly, by practising austerities and meditations. The prince was brought up in the hermitage, where he has grown up and still lives with his venerable parents. That youth named Satyavat (Satyavān) I have chosen as my lord."[122]

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[121] 292. 32-3.

No sooner had the princess stopped than Nārada said in great agitation: "O king, do not let your daughter marry Satyavat, the son of Dyumatsena!"

King Ashwapati was rather surprised to see him so much moved. As he knew the sage to be a great well-wisher, he begged him to let him know what was wrong with that young man. Nārada replied: "Satyavat is bright as the sun, wise as Bṛihaspati (the preceptor of the gods), brave as Indra (the lord of the gods) and forgiving as the earth."[123]

Ashwapati was still more surprised, because all these virtues made the youth the most desirable husband for his only daughter. Yet he knew that without some grave reason a holy man like Nārada would not press for stopping this union. With the anxiety natural to a father who fears some evil might befall his beloved child, he asked: "O blessed one, you are telling me all the virtues with which Satyavat is endowed, now please tell me his defects, if any."[124] Nārada kept quiet for a moment and then slowly replied: "He has but one defect which mars all his virtues. That defect cannot be remedied even if all efforts are made. Within a year from today short-lived Satyavat will breathe his last."[125]

A shudder ran through the hearts of the king and his courtiers. The princess, so radiant a moment before, was pale and trembled. Slowly the king gained control over his own feelings and said to his daughter: "O Sāvitrī, go and choose another for your lord. How, my child, can I consent to your marriage with one whose days are numbered?"

These words of her father made Sāvitrī realize that it was the supreme moment of her life. She must decide between what was pleasant and what was good, and assert her will in favour of what she considered most precious. Gone was her shyness as well as her habitual dependence on her parents in cases of doubt. Awakened to a full sense of its dignity, true womanhood cast its lot in favour of pure love, chastity and self-effacement. Sāvitrī replied in unforgettable words: "The die can fall but once; a daughter can be given away but once; and once only can a person say, 'I give away.' Indeed, whether he has a short or a long life, whether he possesses virtues or is devoid of them, I have selected my husband for once, and I will not select a second man."[126]

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[122] 293. 7-10. [123] 293. 15. [124] 293. 21. [125] 293. 22-3.

The king bowed to the will of his daughter. The sage Nārada, overwhelmed to witness such devotion, chastity and strength of will in one born on earth, gave her his blessings. And arrangements were made for the marriage.

On an auspicious day, the royal couple took their daughter to the hermitage of Dyumatsena, where the marriage took place in all solemnity. Ashwapati gave the newly married pair costly presents. Sāvitrī's joy knew no bounds.

But as soon as her parents left, she put away all her costly things and dressed herself like the daughter-in-law of a hermit. She attended to the needs of her old mother-in-law and tenderly served her blind father-in-law, and her deep love made her union with her husband exceedingly sweet. Yet she constantly pondered on the ominous words of Nārada.

Days and months passed in quick succession. When there were only four short days left, she took up the very difficult vow of Trirātra (three nights' penance). The old king lovingly asked her to forego the vow. But respectfully yet firmly Sāvitrī replied: "Don't worry, dear father, I have taken up this vow, and with your blessings I shall be able to keep it."

Her daily fasts, her nightly vigils and the incessant prayers from her anguished heart burnt the last remnant of dross from her, and Sāvitrī, pale and thin, shone like the flame of a lamp in a holy temple. Everybody around felt the presence of a divine spirit in this modest but resolute wife of Satyavat. Throughout the last night—the thirteenth lunisolar day of the dark half of *Phālguna* (February-

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[126] 293. 26-7.

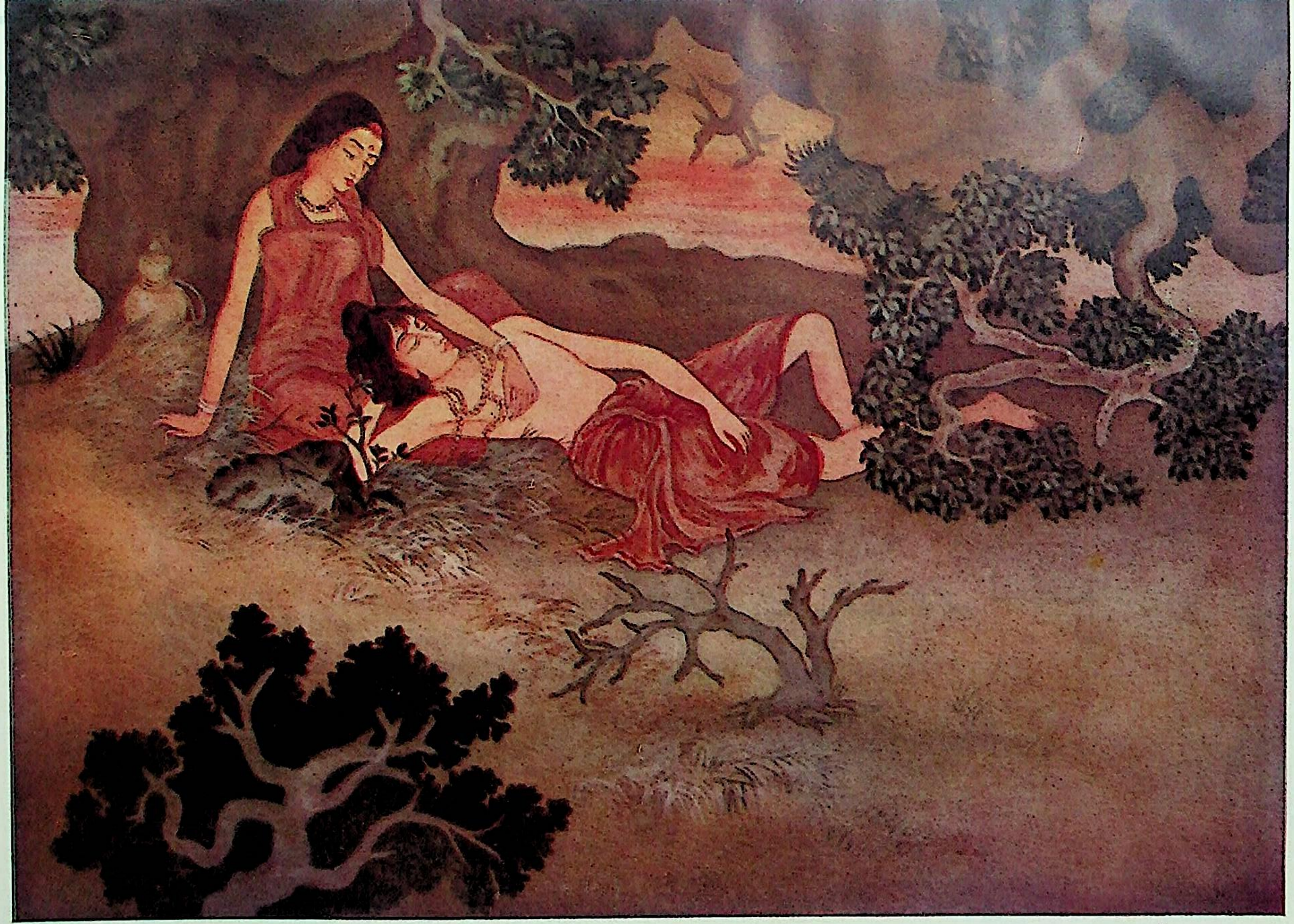
March) Sāvitrī kept her lone vigil. Her eyes were tearless, though her heart was heavy, and oh, how intense were the prayers which rose from her sinless mind! Her love for her husband was perfect, yet she did not share her dreadful secret with him nor with his parents.

Slowly the fateful day dawned, and Sāvitrī got up and came out of the cottage. In the midst of her heart-breaking misery, she did not forget her daily round of duties. When she saluted the aged Brāhmaṇas and her parents-in-law, they blessed her saying, "May thou never be a widow!" How avidly her soul drank those words of assurance uttered by truthful lips! Rays of hope entered her mind, and a strength which knows no defeat filled her soul.

When she was asked to take her food, she said she would break her fast when the sun would set. Just then she saw her husband ready to set out for collecting wood. She decided that she would not let him go out alone, and begged her parents-in-law's permission to accompany him for sight-seeing. Although they knew her to be weak after the fast, they could not refuse it, because it was her first request since her marriage.

Satyavat was delighted to have Sāvitrī by his side, and showed her the richness of forest life, abounding in festive colour, rippling music and sweet fragrance. By and by they came to the heart of the forest, and there Satyavat made her sit under a tree, gathered some sweet, juicy fruits for her and began cutting the branches of trees with his axe. Half his heart was with Sāvitrī, who sat like a goddess, with the sunbeams and shades playing about her, but with her eyes glued on him. Slower and slower did she see the axe rise, with the strokes sounding fainter and fainter, and then it stopped. She saw her husband coming towards her, with dragging feet and sweat on his brows. "O Sāvitrī," he said, "I am suffering from a terrible headache, my heart is throbbing painfully, and I am feeling so weak that I cannot stand. A great sleepiness is overcoming me."

Sāvitrī, trembling with fear, led him to the cool shade of a tree, and made him lie on the ground with his head on her lap. She knew it was the fateful hour and sat like a statue apprehending the worst. All of a sudden she saw a dark, crowned figure with red eyes, clad in red and carrying a noose, standing before her and looking at Satyavat. She gently placed her husband's head on the ground, rose



Artist: *Ardhenduprasad Banerjee* SĀVITRĪ AND SATYAVAT *Courtesy:* *K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review)*

and with a beating heart respectfully spoke to the visitor: "From your superhuman appearance, I think you belong to the celestial world. O chief of the gods, please tell me who you are and what you intend to do."[127] He replied: "Know me to be Yama, the lord of the world where the departed go. The days of this prince in the world of the living are over, and I have come to carry him bound."[128]

With these words Yama drew out the soul from Satyavat's body, bound it with his noose and proceeded towards the south. Sāvitrī followed Yama, who was surprised and said: "Do not come any more, O Sāvitrī, turn back and perform the last rites of your husband. You are not indebted to your lord any more, and you have come as far as possible."[129] Sāvitrī replied: "Where my husband is taken, or where he goes out of his free will, there go I. For eternal law divides not man and wife."[130] Even Yama relented to hear such words of love and wisdom from one so young, and intending to soothe her grief-stricken soul, said: "I am pleased with what you said. Ask for a boon, O faultless one. I shall grant you anything save the life of Satyavat."[131]

Sāvitrī said: "Banished from his kingdom and bereft of his eyesight, my father-in-law lives in a hermitage in the forest. Through your favour let him gain his eyesight and be powerful like the fire and the sun."[132] "Gladly I grant your prayer," said Yama, "but you must go back. You are tired and have traversed a long way." Sāvitrī replied: "How can I feel tired when I am with my husband? The place where you take my husband is surely my destination too. O best of the celestials, do listen to me.[133] Even a single interview with the virtuous is desirable; friendship with them is still more so. A meeting with the virtuous is never fruitless. That is why one should always live with them."[134]

Yama was charmed and told Sāvitrī to ask for another boon save that of Satyavat's life and depart peacefully. Sāvitrī with folded hands asked for the restoration of Dyumatsena to his kingdom, which was granted. But she still followed Yama and spoke so sweetly that he granted her yet another boon. Sāvitrī prayed for worthy sons to carry on the name of her father. The boon was granted.

But Sāvitrī still followed, and Yama could not shake her off.

[127] 296. 11.
[128] 296. 12.
[129] 296. 20.
[130] 296. 21.
[131] 296. 26.
[132] 296. 27.
[133] 296. 29.
[134] 296. 30.

He was being more and more won over by her words of wisdom and love. So he requested her to ask for another boon except the life of Satyavat. Sāvitrī, who had by this time got complete control over herself, said: "Grant me as the fourth boon that through Satyavat I may have one hundred sons, strong and wise, who will perpetuate our race."[135]

Yama granted this also and begged her to depart. But she humbly said: "O bestower of honour, the boon which you have promised just now cannot take place unless my husband Satyavat comes back to life. So I beg of you to restore him to life. Without my husband I am like one dead.[136] Without my husband I do not care for happiness, without him I do not care even for heaven, without him I do not care for wealth nor do I care to live.[137] Just now you were pleased to grant me the boon of a hundred sons, and yet you deprive me of my husband! I beg of you to restore Satyavat to life, so that your words may come true."[138]

"So be it," said Yama, the divine dispenser of judgement, delighted to court defeat from one who was so pure, so loyal and so fearless. "O worthy lady, here is your husband, freed by me."[139]

[135] 296. 45. [136] 296. 52. [137] 296. 52-3. [138] 296. 54. [139] 296. 56.

CHAPTER X

GREAT WOMEN IN THE PURĀṆAS

1. Introduction

However ancient may have been the origin of the Purāṇa as a class of literature, the use of the Purāṇas of five characteristics as a medium for imparting instructions on the Vedic principles of life and conduct to women, Shūdras and the indisciplined members of the upper three castes, is of a comparatively late date and has found clear expression in Purāṇic verses, one of which says: "Women, Shūdras and the mean twice-born are not entitled to hear the Vedas; it is only for their good that the Purāṇas have been written." This new role, which the Purāṇas came to have in course of time, was due mainly to the social disorder created by the wide popularity of Buddhism, Jainism and many other anti-Vedic and non-Vedic religious systems including popular Brahmāism, Vaiṣhṇavism and Shaivism, in all of which women were allowed an amount of freedom and privilege denied to them in the Vedic society from the later Vedic period. The authors of the present Purāṇas and the exponents of their doctrines were fully conscious of the highly important part played by women in maintaining social discipline as well as in building and moulding the nation, but their chief interest being the popularization of the Vedic notions of social and moral discipline as understood by the term *varṇāshrama-dharma* (duties according to castes and stages of life), they could seldom look upon women in any other capacity than that of wives and mothers. It is for this reason that very little is said in the Purāṇas of the life and duties of virgin girls and still less of women as warriors, political administrators or religious reformers; and whatever little is said about them in these capacities, presupposes their subservience to their fathers, husbands or other legal guardians, as the case may be. As a matter of fact, in the Purāṇas women have not been allowed full freedom in the social and religious life under any circumstances, and conjugal fidelity and devoted service to their husbands have been stressed as the highest duties for them.

The frequent and unrestricted interference of gods and introduction of divine and miraculous elements in all matters have characterized the extant Purāṇas, especially the comparatively late ones, and this tendency of the authors of these works has often given to the described incidents a shade of unreality according to modern taste, and in many cases left little distinction between characters human and divine. Though thus idealized, and divorced to a great extent from worldly life, the Purāṇic characters were certainly much more attractive to the common people of those days than even the historical ones, and played an important part in developing and moulding their moral life, no question being raised about the justifiability of the divine or miraculous elements in them. Their deep faith in the agency of the gods in all worldly affairs added charm to the Purāṇic stories, of which they must have appreciated the spirit, and we should make due allowance for this fact, if we want to acquaint ourselves with the characters and incidents described in these works.

2. Mothers

Madālasā: Of the great women described in the Purāṇas in the capacity of devoted wives or worthy mothers or both, it is Madālasā who attracts our special attention. Though possessed of the highest knowledge of the Self, she humbly lived the life of a faithful wife, making no display of her wisdom, and was a typical example of a true housewife according to the Hindu view of life. As stated in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Chapters 20-44, Madālasā was the young, virtuous and exquisitely beautiful daughter of Vishwāvasu, the king of the Gandharvas (celestial minstrels). When one day she was playing in a garden, she was forcibly carried away by a Dānava (demon), Pātālaketu by name, and kept confined in a beautiful city in the nether world with the intention of marrying. In this place Madālasā was joined by her widowed friend Kuṇḍalā, daughter of Vindhyavat, who came there in the course of her visit to holy places. While Madālasā was passing her days of confinement in extreme mental agony, and her marriage with the demon became imminent, she determined to put an end to her life, but was dissuaded from doing so by Surabhi, who assured her saying: "This base Dānava shall not get thee. He who will pierce him with arrows when the latter reaches the world of mortals, that one, O noble lady, will shortly be thy husband"[1]

Immediately after this incident a young prince, Ṛitadhwaja by name, suddenly made his appearance there. Being ordered by his father Shatrujit at the request of the sage Gālava to kill Pātālaketu, who very frequently created troubles in Gālava's hermitage by assuming the forms of various dreadful animals, Ṛitadhwaja encountered the Dānava in that hermitage, hit him with an arrow, and chased him to the nether world by riding an extraordinary horse of unobstructed movement, named Kuvalaya, which was given to him by Gālava for the purpose. Ṛitadhwaja's unparalleled physical beauty and majestic appearance powerfully attracted Madālasā, whose love was deepened all the more by his narration of his own story. At the persuasion of Kuṇḍalā, Ṛitadhwaja (also called Kuvalayāshwa from his horse Kuvalaya) gave his consent to marry Madālasā, and the marriage ceremony was duly performed by her family priest Tumburu. Being completely satisfied at Madālasā's union with Ṛitadhwaja, Kuṇḍalā left them with the following advice to Ṛitadhwaja:

"Verily a husband must ever cherish and protect his wife. A wife is her husband's helpmate unto the complete attainment of religion, wealth and love. When both wife and husband are controlled by each other, then all the three combine—religion, wealth and love. . . . Men cannot perform the worship of the gods, Pitṛis (manes), dependants and guests without a wife, O prince! Riches too, although acquired by men, or brought to their own home, waste away without a wife, or even where a worthless wife dwells. And there is indeed no love for him without a wife—this is clearly evident. By community of the wedded pair in their duties, they may attend to the three duties. A man satisfies the Pitṛis with children; guests with preparations of food; likewise the immortal gods with worship; as a man he satisfies a virtuous wife. Similarly, for a woman there is no religion, love, wealth or offspring without a husband. Hence this threefold group rests upon the wedded life."[2]

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[1] *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 21. 33.

[2] *Ibid.* 21. 70-1, 74-8.

Ṛitadhwaja brought Madālasā to his father's capital after routing and killing Pātālaketu and other demons who came to obstruct him. Shatrujit was highly satisfied at his bravery and praised him very much for his exploits. Ṛitadhwaja felt completely happy with Madālasā, who pleased her husband with sincere love and his parents with respectful service, but destiny was cruelly against this happy union of the newly married couple. Some time after this, Ṛitadhwaja was ordered by his father to save the brahmins and sages from troubles created by demons. Consequently, he began to visit the different parts of his father's kingdom by riding his horse, and on one occasion he chanced to meet Tālaketu, the younger brother of Pātālaketu, who was residing on the bank of the river Yamunā under the guise of a brahmin sage with the intention of avenging the death of his brother. Finding Ṛitadhwaja in his hermitage, Tālaketu approached him, begged of him his gold neck-ornament (*kaṇṭha-bhūṣhaṇa*) on the pretext of using it as a sacrificial fee, and asked him to guard his hermitage until he returned from the neighbouring river after praising Varuṇa with Vedic verses. Ṛitadhwaja agreed.

Tālaketu took this opportunity to come over to Shatrujit's capital, hand over the neck-ornament to the king, and give out that Ṛitadhwaja had been killed by the demons, who took away his horse also. This news was too unbearable for Madālasā, who immediately gave up her life under the burden of grief. Though every one in the palace was bitterly lamenting the death of Ṛitadhwaja and Madālasā, Shatrujit and his wife could compose themselves soon with the consolation that Ṛitadhwaja had died a glorious death in the course of his efforts to protect the brahmins in obedience to his father's command, and Madālasā had done the duty of a faithful wife by immediately following her husband in his death. Tālaketu saw that his mission had been fulfilled to his entire satisfaction. He returned to his hermitage and relieved Ṛitadhwaja of his duty with thanks.

Being out for a long time, Ṛitadhwaja hastened to the capital, but, alas, Madālasā was no more to be found! Though rudely shocked by Madālasā's death, he performed all the obsequial rites for the satisfaction of her soul, and determined to lead a life of perfect chastity.

Ṛitadhwaja's manifold qualities of the head and heart won for him the sincere friendship of two Nāga princes, who one day reported to their father, the Nāga king Ashwatara, all about Ṛitadhwaja and his mental condition consequent upon Madālasā's death. Ashwatara felt deeply for the unfortunate prince and by his austerities brought Madālasā back to life in exactly the same physical condition as at the time of her death. As Ashwatara wanted, this time Madālasā retained the memory of her previous existence and became 'an adept in and the mother of yoga' (*yoginī yoga-mātā cha*). Keeping her concealed in his palace, Ashwatara managed to have Ṛitadhwaja brought to his capital by his sons and asked him what precious thing he would like to accept from him as a present. As Ṛitadhwaja had no desire for anything but the sight of his deceased wife, Ashwatara presented Madālasā before him saying that she was nothing but an illusion (*maya*) created by his magic power. As soon as Ṛitadhwaja looked at Madālasā, his emotions became too strong for him, and he fell down in a swoon. Madālasā saw all this and thought: "O the affection of this king and his steadfast mind upon me, whereby this killer of foes has been laid down without a weapon! I have been shown as an illusion. So I am unreal, as clearly I am an illusion created by the action of air, water, fire, earth and ether."[3] As a matter of fact, with her new existence real knowledge had dawned in her, and she realized that her physical existence was nothing more than an illusion. Ashwatara then consoled Ṛitadhwaja and restored Madālasā to him after divulging the whole matter. Ṛitadhwaja was very glad to regain his wife and soon returned with her to his father's capital.

Now, while Ṛitadhwaja was enjoying the company of Madālasā, and the latter also was contributing to his pleasure, only 'for bringing about the exhaustion of merits through enjoyment of desires,' King Shatrujit died, and the burden of the kingdom fell on Ṛitadhwaja. Some time after this, a son was born to Madālasā. The king named him Vikrānta, and all the inmates of the palace rejoiced at the child's birth, but Madālasā had only a laugh. When the new-born child cried lying on its back, Madālasā said to it by way of a lullaby:

"Holy art thou, darling! Thou hast no name, because it has been given thee only recently through fancy. This very body is composed of the five elements; neither it belongs to thee nor dost thou belong to it. Then wherefore art thou crying? Or, thou art not crying at all; this sound is coming out of itself by having the king's son (as a medium). . . . Do not grow infatuated with this garment of thine, which is decaying, nor with that body; thy body is caused by good and bad deeds, and thy garment also has been fastened on thee by persons infatuated by pride and other passions. (Yet) shouldst thou greatly esteem each aggregate of the elements—some one as a father, some other as a child, some one as a mother, some other as a wife, some one as thy own property, some other as not thy own? A man beguiled in mind thinks that evils assuage evils, and enjoyments tend to happiness. Again, the unwise man, greatly deluded in mind, takes these very evils to be pleasures. . . . The carriage rests on the earth, and the body remains in the carriage; and in the body also there is another seated, the soul. There is not the same notion of ownership (with respect to the soul), as very much as one has in one's own body. Alas, this infatuation!"[4]

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[3] *Ibid.* 24. 40-1.

As the son grew up, Madālasā continued to give him instructions on Self-knowledge in the form of coaxing talks, with the result that the highest type of spiritual knowledge dawned upon him, and being bereft of attachment to objects of enjoyment, he became totally indifferent to the life of a householder.

As time passed on, Madālasā gave birth to two more sons. The king named them Subāhu and Shatrudamana respectively, but Madālasā only gave out a prolonged laughter. As in the case of her first son, Madālasā took care to impart spiritual knowledge to Subāhu and Shatrudamana from their very birth, and the result was that they also became indifferent to the world. At last when the fourth son was born to her, the king looked at his wife with the intention of giving him a name, and this time also Madālasā laughed. The king became curious, and, failing to discover any inconsistency in the names of his sons which he selected with an eye to the natural valour and pride of a Kṣhatriya, he requested Madālasā, to choose a name for his fourth son. She respected her husband's wish and gave the name 'Alarka' (mad dog) to the new-born child. Hearing this funny name, the king laughed out and asked Madālasā why she had given such an inappropriate name and what was its meaning.

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[4] *Ibid.* 25. 11-2, 14-6, 18.

Madālasā replied: "This is my fancy, O great king; I have taken to it, as is the practice (with people). So listen, O king, to the meaninglessness of the names given by thee. Since wise men speak of a pervading soul, and *krānti* (movement) is described as the passage from one place to another, and since the lord of the body (i.e. the soul) is all-pervading in that it is ubiquitous and does not move about, therefore the appellation Vikrānta, 'Passed beyond,' appears to me meaningless. The appellation Subāhu, 'Fine-armed,' given to thy second son, is also meaningless, because the soul is incorporeal, O king. The name that thou hast given to the third son, Shatrudamana, 'Foe-crusher'—I think that too is inappropriate; and listen to the reason as regards it. Since there is only one soul in all bodies, who then, O king, is regarded as its enemy in this world, or who as its friend? Elements are crushed by elements; how can the incorporeal be crushed? This fancy is meaningless because of the separateness of anger and other passions (from the soul). If a bad name is fixed upon for mutual dealing, why dost thou think there is no meaning in the name Alarka?"[5]

The king admitted the logic in Madālasā's arguments. He, however, earnestly requested her not to give instructions on spiritual knowledge to Alarka, but to direct him in the path of action (*pravṛitti-mārga*), so that he might be of service to the gods, men and other creatures, and the manes might not be deprived of their share of the prepared food. In compliance with his wish Madālasā said to her new-born son in the form of a lullaby: "Thrive, my son, (and) rejoice my husband's mind with thy deeds, in order to benefit friends and destroy enemies. Happy art thou, my son, who alone, with never an enemy, wilt long protect the earth; from protecting it mayst thou have full enjoyment of happiness, and from righteousness thou shalt obtain the fruit, immortality. Mayst thou delight the gods on earth (brahmins) at the holy festivals! Mayst thou fulfil the longing among thy kinsmen! Mayst thou think kindly in thy heart for another! Mayst thou restrain thy mind from the wives of others! Please continually the gods with numerous sacrifices, and the twice-born who resort to thee, with wealth. And thou shalt long satisfy women with unparalleled affections, and thy foes with battles, O hero! As a child, gladden the mind of thy kinsmen; as a boy, the mind of thy teacher by observance of his commands; as a young man, gladden the mind of women who are the ornament of high families; as an old man, the mind of the hermits in the forest. Exercising thy sovereignty mayst thou gladden thy friends! Guarding the good, mayst thou offer up sacrifices, darling! Destroying the wicked and thy enemies in battle, mayst thou meet thy death, my child, on behalf of cattle and brahmins!"[6]

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[5] *Ibid.* 26. 16-23.

As Alarka grew up Madālasā gave him instructions on the duties of a king as well as on those of the members of the four castes in the different stages of their life, putting special stress on self-control, prudence and maintenance of the laws. In course of time, he attained youth, got married and had sons. Ṛitadhwaja, who had by this time become sufficiently old, installed Alarka on the throne and prepared to retire to the forest for practising austerities. Madālasā, who was to accompany her husband in this new life, wanted to deliver her son from a life of enjoyment and said to him: "Should intolerable pain, arising from separation from thy dear kinsmen, or caused by the opposition of thy enemies, or springing from the destruction of thy wealth or from thy own self, befall thee as thou rulest thy kingdom, observing the laws of a householder—for the householder who depends on selfishness makes unhappiness his abode—then, my son, (draw forth and) read (from this ring that I have given thee) the writing that is inlaid in fine letters on the plate."[7] She then handed over the gold ring to him and went away with the king.

Alarka reigned with success and peace for many years, but did not get satisfied with enjoyment. His elder brother Subāhu, who had taken to a forest-life long ago, heard about Alarka's attachment to his kingdom and thought out a plan to divert him from such a life. For wresting the kingdom from Alarka he sought the help of the king of Kāshī, who, at Subāhu's request, attacked Alarka's kingdom and occupied it. Alarka's city was besieged, and his life was made unbearable. Finding no way out from such a miserable plight, Alarka at last thought of the gold ring given to him by his mother. After purifying himself by a bath he drew out the ring and read the instructions, written in clear letters, which were as follows: "Association must be shunned by every soul; if to shun it be impossible, it should be formed with the good, for association

[6] *Ibid.* 26. 34-9.

[7] *Ibid.* 36. 6-7.

with the good is a panacea. Desire must be shunned by all means; if to eschew it be impossible, it should be directed towards final emancipation (from transmigratory existence), for that desire is a cure therefor."[8]

Alarka read the instructions again and again and was filled with joy. Being shown the way to peace and bliss, he approached Dattātreya, a great yogi, and had necessary instructions from him on yoga practices as well as on the nature of the soul, the mind, the body, and pleasure and pain. Freed from egoism and attachment to worldly objects, Alarka expressed gratitude to his elder brother and the king of Kāshī, and heartily thanked them for kindly occupying his kingdom. He then joyfully left the throne and retired to the forest.

Devahūti: Another great woman of profound spiritual knowledge was Devahūti, mother of the great sage Kapila, who spoke out the Sāṁkhya system of philosophy. According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (3. 21-33), she was the daughter of Swāyaṁbhuva Manu, the primeval king of the human race, and had, from her very birth, all the features of yoga natural to her. When she grew up, she heard of Prajāpati Kardama's character and attainments as a great sage and determined to have him as her husband. In the meantime Kardama also became anxious for having a suitable wife, so that by having sons he might relieve himself of the obligations to his Pitṛis (manes). For this he worshipped Vishṇu who assured Kardama that he would marry Devahūti, daughter of Swāyaṁbhuva Manu, and have him as a son under the name of Kapila. Coming to know of Devahūti's resolve, Swāyaṁbhuva Manu one day came with his wife and daughter to Kardama's hermitage on the bank of the river Saraswatī and, after explaining her mind, very modestly offered his daughter's hand to the sage. Kardama had already heard of her youthful beauty, the very sight of which, he said, during her play with a ball, had once caused Vishwāvasu, a Gandharva, to faint down from his aerial car. Kardama agreed to marry Devahūti on condition that he would live with her only till her conception, after which he would resume his life of austerities. Having Kardama's consent, Swāyaṁbhuva Manu solemnly performed the marriage ceremony and returned to his capital at Barhishmatī with his wife.

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[8] *Ibid.* 37. 23-4.

Devahūti, who was left in the hermitage, wished to win her husband's blessings by rendering whole-hearted service to him, and in attending upon him she totally shunned pride, hatred, avarice and other passions and had no regard for her own body. For a pretty long time she continued her vigilant and selfless service and at last Kardama was pleased to furnish her with divine vision so that she might experience the celestial enjoyments she won by her service. Being encouraged by his affectionate treatment, Devahūti reminded him of his former pledge to bless her with offspring. He fulfilled her wish for motherhood by means of his yogic powers, and the result was that Devahūti gave birth to a number of girls. When, after this, Kardama prepared to renounce all worldly attachments, Devahūti approached him with an afflicted mind and said: "Your revered self has performed for me all that was promised ; yet you should be pleased to grant immunity from fear to me who have sought your protection. O Brahman, your daughters will have to approach you for worthy husbands, and there should be some male offspring to console me after you have retired to the forest. There is no use of speaking about this (long) period of time, my lord, which I have passed with attachment to objects of the senses giving up the Supreme Soul. Being addicted to objects of the senses, I associated myself with you without knowing the final truth (from you) ; yet, let this be for my immunity from fear. Association, when formed with the wicked through imprudence, becomes the cause of rebirths, but the same is conducive to freedom from attachment if it is made with the good. One, whose work here is meant neither for the attainment of religious merit (*dharma*) nor for creating indifference or rendering service to the Lord, is as good as dead, even though one may be living. Surely I have been beguiled by the magic power of your revered self, since I felt no desire for freedom from bondage even after having you, the bestower of final release."[9]

Hearing these words of Devahūti, Kardama assured her that the almighty God (Vishṇu) Himself would be born to her as her son and sever all her ties by giving instructions on the knowledge of

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[9] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, 3. 23. 51-7.

Brahman. Devahūti felt much encouraged and worshipped Vishṇu for a long time, after which the Deity was pleased to be born to Devahūti as Kapila.

After Kardama had left for the forest, Kapila began to live with his mother for doing good to her. One day Devahūti said to Kapila: "O great one, I have become very much disgusted with the thirst of my wicked organs of sense, by going to satisfy which I have entered into blinding darkness, O mighty one. Today through thy favour I have received thee, after a number of births, as an excellent eye that takes me through that blinding darkness which is difficult to cross. Thou who art said to be the pre-eminent and glorious Lord of all beings, art, like the sun that has risen, the eye of the world blinded by darkness. Now, O Lord, be pleased to remove my infatuation, which is a false idea of 'I,' 'mine,' etc. created by thee with respect to this body. I betake myself to thee, who deservest to be approached for protection and art an axe to the tree of rebirths of myself and my dependants. With a desire to know of Prakṛiti and Purusha I bow down to thee, the best of the knowers of the religion of the good."[10]

Coming to know of his mother's sincere and honest wish, Kapila spoke out Sāṁkhya-yoga with an elaborate discourse on *bhakti* (devotion) and added at the end that this Sāṁkhya-yoga had been declared by him in ancient times to the inquisitive sages, and that by it people could realize the Purusha (Supreme Being) by getting out of the influence of Prakṛiti (Nature). While Kapila was explaining his metaphysical and philosophical views, Devahūti put to him searching questions, which amply testify to her uncommon interest and wisdom. Kapila's instructions enlightened Devahūti, who thus became a *brahmavādinī* (an expounder of Brahman) in the true sense of the term and was, through absolute meditation, absorbed into the Supreme Spirit.

3. WIVES

Mention of other spiritually enlightened women is not totally wanting in the Purāṇas, but much more attention has been given by the writers of these works to the narration of stories of women who regarded faithful service to their husbands as the highest duty and religion in life. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and the *Padma Purāṇa* (Sṛiṣhṭi-khaṇḍa) there is the story of a brahmin leper's wife who, being eager to make her husband happy by all means, carried him under the cover of darkness to the house of a public woman whose beauty had attracted him ; the Bhūmi-khaṇḍa of the *Padma Purāṇa* contains the story of Sukalā, who, though left behind in want and misery by her husband who went on a pilgrimage, could by no means be seduced even by Kāma, the god of love, and Indra, the king of the gods ; the *Narasiṁha Purāṇa* has the story of a brahmin's wife, Sāvitrī by name, who attained supernatural power and wisdom by devoutly serving her husband ; and so on. But the best and most popular Purāṇic stories showing idealized love in married life are those of Satī and Umā, who, though much more divine than human, have been respected very highly and looked upon as ideals in all ages for their strength of character and selfless love for their husbands.

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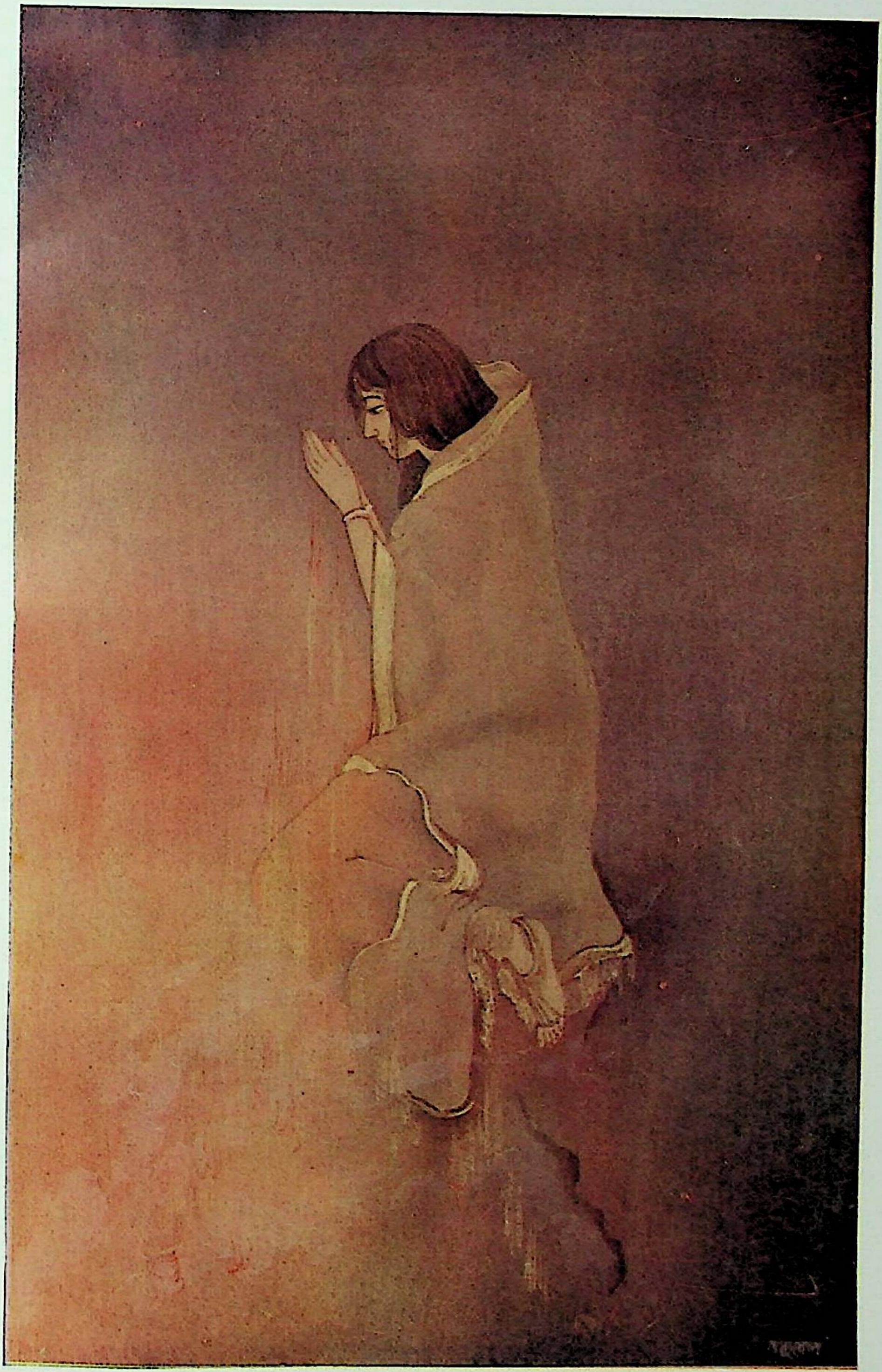
[10] *Ibid.* 3. 25. 7-11.

Satī: The story of Satī has been given in more or less varying forms in many of the Purāṇas and Upa-purāṇas (minor Purāṇas), such as the *Vāyu Purāṇa, Liṅga Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Brahma Purāṇa, Shiva Purāṇa, Bṛihaddharma Purāṇa* and *Mahābhāgavata*. According to these sources, Prajāpati Dakṣha had a number of daughters, of whom Satī, the eldest, was married to Shiva. Once Dakṣha instituted a pompous sacrifice, in which he invited all his daughters and the gods and sages, except Shiva and Satī. Dakṣha was not favourably inclined to Shiva for the latter's peculiar habits and irreverent attitude. Somehow or other Satī came to learn that all her sisters had gone with their husbands to attend her father's sacrifice. Being impelled by her natural desire to see her parents and sisters as well as by her curiosity to know the cause of such an attitude of Dakṣha, she went to her father's house uninvited and had a very cold reception there. This was discouraging to Satī, who was further mortified to find that no arrangement was made there to receive Shiva in the sacrifice, although places of honour had been assigned to all other gods. Feeling humiliated, Satī met her father and asked him why Shiva was not invited there. Dakṣha decried Shiva by referring to his habits, dress, attendants, mode of living and mental tendencies, and justified his own stand with regard



SATI

Artist: *Nandalal Bose*

Courtesy: *K. N. Chatterji (Modern Review)*

to the latter. Satī could no longer tolerate the neglect shown to her husband and burst out saying:

"Who except you can be hostile to Shiva, who is free from enmity and is the soul of all, whom none can excel in this world, and who, being the dear self of embodied beings, knows no favourite or otherwise? . . . The most generous men feel inclined to magnify the smallest virtues, but you discovered vice in these. It is no wonder that great men always censure with intolerance those wicked people who hold that the body (itself) is the soul; . . . Alas, you, an unlucky person, hate that Shiva of holy fame and inviolable command whose disyllabic name (Shiva), pronounced for even a single time in the course of conversation, immediately destroys one's sin! You revolt against that friend of all whose lotus-feet shower blessings on the supplicating world. . . . Did Brahmā and the gods, other than yourself, who hold on their crests the (flowers) touched by his feet, not know that god named Shiva as an inauspicious being who lived with goblins on the cremation ground, spreading out his matted hair and wearing the garlands, ashes and skulls of that place? If incapable (of redress), one should leave the place by closing one's ears when the Lord (Shiva), the protector of religion (*dharma*) is freely decried by men; but if capable, one should tear out by force the denouncing tongues of the wicked and then give up one's own life—that is *dharma*. So I shall no longer sustain this body produced from you who censure the dark-throated (god), because, as people say, the vomiting out of the condemned food eaten through mistake leads to purification."[11]

Satī then took her seat on the ground, closed her eyes, and reduced her body to ashes by the yogic fire produced internally by abstract meditation on Shiva.

Umā: The story of Umā, also has been narrated in more or less different forms in many of the major and minor Purāṇas and in most cases it betrays the influence of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava*. As the main story, as given in the *Matsya* and some other comparatively early Purāṇas, has general agreement with that of Kālidāsa's work, it is needless to give it here in detail. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Umā, daughter of Himālaya, was to be married to Shiva. After the latter had burnt Kāma, the god of love, Umā became hopeless of her marriage with Shiva, and determined to win his favour by practising austerities and not by the charms of her youthful beauty. In spite of her parents' protests she took to an austere life and was at last able to win Shiva's affection.

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[11] *Ibid.* 4. 4. 11-8.

Shaibyā: Of other Purāṇic women of note, it is Shaibyā, Sunīti and Bhāminī who deserve mention here. As stated in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and the *Devī-bhāgavata,* Shaibyā was the loving queen of King Harishchandra. She faithfully followed her husband in weal and woe, and, in order to save him from Vishwāmitra's curse, induced him to sell her into slavery for procuring the honorarium to be paid to the sage to whom Harishchandra had given his entire kingdom as a gift.

Sunīti: Sunīti, as the *Vishṇu* and other Purāṇas say, was the neglected wife of King Uttānapāda and the mother of the famous Dhruva, who later attained an honourable place in the firmament. When yet a child, Dhruva one day came to his mother and complained of his father's indifferent treatment and his stepmother Suruchi's cutting remarks for his mere wish to sit on the king's lap. Sunīti was sorry to hear her son's words, but she did not lose her patience, nor did she fall an easy prey to jealousy, which would have been very natural to her. She gave out a long sigh and said gently: "Suruchi has spoken the truth, my child, that you are one of little fortune. . . . But have no concern, my son ; who can take away what you earned (by your action) before, and who can give you what you did not (earn)? The royal seat, the umbrella, the best horses and the best elephants belong to him who has (acquired) merits; considering this, have tranquillity of mind, my child. The king has got a strong liking for Suruchi owing to her merits acquired in another birth. . . . Her son Uttama has an accumulation of merits ; on the other hand, you, my son Dhruva, have been born as one of little merit. Yet, my son, you should not be sorry for it ; an intelligent man remains satisfied with whatever he gets as his own. Or, if you have been very much mortified by Suruchi's words, then try to earn merit which yields everything. Be good-natured, righteous, friendly and bent on doing good to creatures. Like water that flows to a low land, prosperity comes to a man of worth."[12] These sober and well-balanced instructions of his mother worked a miracle in Dhruva, who took to austerities and was able to gain an enviable position, for which he has been famous in Indian literature.

Bhāminī: Bhāminī, as the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* says, was the mother of King Marutta and the chief queen of King Avīkṣhita. Once she was approached by the Nāgas for protection when they were going to be exterminated by Marutta at the instance of his grandmother Vīrā for causing death to sages. Bhāminī assured them safety and requested her husband Avīkṣhita to stop Marutta from killing the Nāgas. At the request of his wife and the prayer of the Nāgas, Avīkṣhita also promised protection to them, but Marutta could not be prevented from doing what he regarded as his sacred duty as a king. Consequently, a war was going to break out between the father and the son—a war which would not come to an end without costing the life of either of them. But Bhāminī was unmoved. She would rather lose her husband or son or both, but she could not leave to their fate the helpless Nāgas who sought her protection. The calamity was, however, averted by Bhṛigu and other sages, who caused the Nāgas to revive the sages killed by them.

4. UNMARRIED GIRL

Sharmiṣhṭhā: It has already been said that the present Purāṇas seldom refer to the duties of virgin girls as members of society. The only instance which can be mentioned here is that of Sharmiṣhṭhā, daughter of the Dānava (demon) king Vṛiṣhaparvan. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa,* which has borrowed the story almost verbatim from the *Mahābhārata,* Sharmiṣhṭhā was a friend of Devayānī, the only daughter of Shukrāchārya, the preceptor of the Dānavas. One day Sharmiṣhṭhā, Devayānī and their friends sported in water in a pleasure garden, and when they came up, Sharmiṣhṭhā put on the clothes of Devayānī through mistake. This gave rise to a quarrel, in which Sharmiṣhṭhā being excited by Devayānī's remarks, called her a beggar's daughter, and ended by pushing her into a dry, shallow well. Devayānī was rescued by

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[12] *Viṣhṇu Purāṇa,* I. 11. 16-23.

King Yayāti, who happened to come there hunting. Being naturally proud, she felt very much insulted. She sent word to her father, and on meeting him incited him against Vṛiṣhaparvan. When Devayānī could by no means be pacified, Shukrāchārya came to Vṛiṣhaparvan and sternly ordered him to please Devayānī for the insult done to her by Sharmiṣhṭhā. He also threatened the king that if he failed to obey his order, he would leave him forthwith. Vṛiṣhaparvan got nervous. He immediately went to Devayānī and asked how she could be pleased. Devayānī said: "I want to have Sharmiṣhṭhā as my maidservant with a thousand virgin girls. She will follow me wherever my father will give (me in marriage)."[13]

At these words of Devayānī, Vṛiṣhaparvan at once sent a nurse to bring Sharmiṣhṭhā there to do as desired by Devayānī. The nurse went to Sharmiṣhṭhā and said: "Rise, virtuous Sharmiṣhṭhā, and minister to the good of your kinsmen. At Devayānī's instigation the brahmin is going to leave his disciples. You must do what she wants, O faultless girl! You have become a maidservant of Devayānī, O beautiful one!"[14]

Though this order from her father came as a bolt from the blue, Sharmiṣhṭhā was calm and steady, and not a word of protest came from her lips. The good of her kinsmen was uppermost in her mind, and she sacrificed herself completely to that end. She only said: "I shall certainly do today what is wanted of me. Let not Shukrāchārya and Devayānī give themselves up to rage for my sake."[15] She at once came to Devayānī in a palanquin with a thousand virgins in her train and said: "I become your attending maidservant with these thousand girls; I will accompany you wherever your father will give you (in marriage)."[16]

Devayānī took this opportunity to sneer at Sharmiṣhṭhā and said sarcastically: "I am the daughter of a flatterer, beggar and receiver of gifts. Being the daughter of the (person) eulogized, how will you become a maidservant?"[17] Sharmiṣhṭhā showed no resentment, but calmly replied: "One should do good to one's distressed kinsmen by any means. I shall accompany you wherever your father will give you (in marriage)."[18]

Devayānī was completely satisfied and returned with her father to their residence. But Sharmiṣhṭhā's strength of character, her power of self-control, her spirit of self-sacrifice and her implicit obedience to her father have elevated her to the position of an ideal woman who is still remembered with reverence by all Hindus.

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[13] *Matsya Purāṇa,* 29. 17.

[14] *Ibid.* 29. 20.

[15] *Ibid.* 29. 21.

[16] *Ibid.* 29. 23.

[17] *Ibid.* 29. 24.

[18] *Ibid.* 29. 25.

5. Conclusion

It should be mentioned here that most of the above accounts of great women occur in those parts of the present Purāṇas which come from early dates and are representative of an earlier state of society. With the progress of time new social problems arose, and the Hindu society lost much of its force and vitality and came to be stereotyped. The Purāṇas seem to have passed into the hands of inferior classes of people, who for some reason or other eliminated from these works many of the earlier portions, but failed to enrich them with fresh narrative material of real value and interest. Ancient characters like Sītā and Sāvitrī have been repeated in the present Purāṇas, but have lost much of their charm, being modified according to the religious needs of later Purāṇic times.

CHAPTER XI

GREAT WOMEN IN SANSKRIT CLASSICS

1. General Characteristics

It is an accredited fact that in its conception of greatness Indian thought, all along its chequered history, has never been oblivious of the foundation of its essence of goodness ; and Classical Sanskrit Literature interpreted and illustrated it in its varied and virile effulgence. Its basic veneer of aristocratic refinement and culture has not sapped its root, nor has it tended to detract it from its wide patronage and esteem. Although never direct, the formulations of early literary critics point to a recognizable norm or standard regarding greatness in women. One is tempted to regard Kālidāsa's characterization of Indumatī, the shortlived queen of Aja, as the mistress of the house or the family (*gṛihiṇī*), the helpful counsellor (*sachiva*), the trusted companion (*mithaḥ-sakhī*) and the esteemed pupil in the practice of fine art (*priyashiṣhyā lalite kalāvidhau*) as pointing to such a norm ; but it is risky to hail it in the context of modern inclinations or to understand it as a departure from traditional thought. For Kālidāsa has no fancy for new-fangledness of ideas and ideals, and his female characters are in no sense meant to be novel in aim and intent. The above characterization no doubt voices a reaction to the morbid or cynical estimate of the role of women in society as presented by the writers of fables and polity and by the Buddhistic and Neo-Buddhistic purists, and as presented in works like the *Bṛihatkathā,* which is an encyclopaedic folk-lore collection in Prakrit. Ashwaghoṣha, an illustrious Buddhist predecessor of Kālidāsa, is not always highly eulogistic about women. It was Kālidāsa who, as the best exponent of Indian thought, stemmed the tide and set at rest all doubts and misgivings about their worth.

The characterization noted above is to a great extent based on the model held out in the *Kāma-sūtra* of Vātsyāyana (4. 35), which has decried the craze for renunciation and annihilation of desires and espoused the cause of a healthy enjoyment of life. The Arthashāstra went to the extent of exploiting women, in actual practice or in pose, as a nefarious means for political ends. The Dharma-shāstra, the mainstay of cultured and progressive society in the eye of the Hindus, while supporting her noble role as the shining light (*gṛiha-dīpti*) in the family and as the grace and prestige thereof, relegates to her the task of the propagation of the family in conformity with the Vedic injunction dating from the days of the Brāhmaṇas. The control and disbursement of the family budget, provision of neatness and religious observances and the cooking of the food for the family should be her engrossing occupations. She must be at all times under the male guardian and always keep aloof from 'subtle associations' which may defile her. The *Mahābhārata* holds that a woman without her protector is helpless; the *Harṣha-charita,* consistently with this attitude, posits self-immolation of the widow. While in extreme marginal cases a bias towards the Kāma-shāstra model of enjoyment, even exulting in a childless state or in separation from progeny, is not rare in great classical masters, the general view has been towards a synthesis of the Kāma-shāstra and the Dharma-shāstra standards with an undisguised preference for the latter. That the former outlook was not entirely rejected is evident from the Sanskrit poeticists' time-honoured analysis of women from the view-point that the primary occupation of women is love. This has been the view held right from the days of Bharata's *Nāṭya-shāstra,* as evidenced by its sub-divisions of the heroine under the heads of the calm and collected (*dhīrā*), the elegant and sporting (*lalitā*), the dignified and noble (*udāttā*), the sequestered and reserved (*nibhṛitā*), the last two pertaining to family women, the second and the third to courtesans. This is clear from the practice of weaving love-episodes round semi-legendary royal figures, as also from what may seem to be astounding to a moralist—the open support of practices like indulging in the company of courtesans.

The following peculiarities are found generally, if not universally, applicable to women:

(*i*) Women's proper place is not in the way of exercising supreme power. Independence through exercise of self-willed action is not her birthright; she is the ministering angel acting in unison and in obedience to her male guardian.

(*ii*) Natural propensity for good is what characterizes her. Wicked and mischievous husbands have not unoften good wives, who are great because of their goodness. Barring the pre-eminent case of Gāndhārī, who believes in the triumph of truth and goodness and pleads for it, the tribe of Bhānumatī, the queen of Duryodhana, Mandodarī and Nikaṣhā, the wife and the mother of Rāvaṇa, respectively, are good at heart, but passive. Some Sanskrit classical writers have tried to whitewash even Kaikeyī ; and the rather rare lapse of Sītā as in her reprimand of Lakṣhmaṇa on the eve of her being carried away is cleverly explained as her being superimposed by the spirit of Shūrpaṇakhā.

(*iii*) Patience, forbearance and penitence—this is the badge of her sex. She is a handmaid (*dāsī*) in her household affairs, a willing participator (*patnī*) in her husband's religious activities, but primarily she is the typification of forbearance, like the all-forbearing mother earth (*sahane dharitrī*).

(*iv*) The ideal woman of Indian thought, as Swāmī Vivekānanda puts it, is Sītā, Umā or Sāvitrī. The ideal is based on Paurāṇika representation ; and very rarely has the Sanskrit poet any tendency to depart from it.

(*v*) A classic poet's business is to interpret the old idea clearly with novelty (*vaichitrya*) in manner and expression, and to support it on the basis of propriety (*auchitya*), and not to court danger and disruption to society by importing fanciful models.

2. Typical Examples

Sītā: The foremost character that has captured the imagination of Sanskrit classical writers is Sītā. The characteristic Indian concept of the wife's exclusive devotion to her husband finds a living embodiment in her. She is conducive to his good (*ātmanīna*), ready at his beck and call, ever in tune with him. To her this is the essence of all-round good and thereby spiritual betterment. It is through her trials and privations and in her wonderful accommodating instinct that the Sanskrit poets trace the strength of her character, but in the main details they follow the epic narrative. Her real picture appears from the moment of exile in the forest of her husband, whom she follows more instinctively than as duty-bound. A habitation subsequently she finds, and that for quite a good number of years, in the lovely Janasthāna of the Daṇḍaka forest. She lives there an idyllic life, scattering joy all round, for her husband was to her a joy for ever. "King, thou wast in this very bower of creepers having thy eyes fixed on the path by which she would return ; she continued long on the sand bank of the Godāvarī, having her attention attracted by the swans ; when she was coming, seeing thee apparently very anxious, she made through fear a graceful suppliant folding of the hands like the shoot of a lotus" (*Uttara-Rāma-charita*). But even this joy of settled life in the forest is denied to her. The cruel demon Rāvaṇa carries her away. In the Ashoka garden of Laṅkā where she is kept, her one thought day and night is that of her husband, and the conviction that he would triumph over her captor keeps her alive. She is unmoved by the tricks played by the wily Rāvaṇa. Finally she is rescued and brought back to her husband's place and is installed as the queen. But good fortune is not her lot. She is banished, branded with infamy, but she entertains no ill feeling towards her husband or anybody else. Thus does she speak in a message to her lord at the time of her exile (*Raghuvaṁsha*):

"For once, beloved, thou didst rather choose
Exile with me than Lakṣhmī's offered charms ;
I ousted her ; abiding in thy home,
Her jealous fury triumphs over me now.
. . . but once son is born,
Unswerving I shall fix my weary eyes
On yon bright sun ; and severest modes
Of penance strive that in some future life
Thou shalt be my lord, my lord for aye:"

She is delivered of twins, and lives a dedicated life thereafter. At the news of her husband performing Ashwamedha sacrifice with her golden image and with no second spouse by his side, she feels relieved that her honour has been vindicated. The rest of the story is tragic. Poetic justice, to be sure, demands a different ordination. The sympathetic Bhavabhūti in his *Uttara-Rāma-charita* wonders whether this could have been the object of Vālmīki's poem; and manages to change the *dénouement* into one of a reunion.

Other Types: It is not merely in the poet's fancy that love metaphorically triumphs over death, but in Indian tradition this is no less than the unvarnished truth. It is a reality in the case of Sāvitrī, who occupies a high place in the galaxy of great women for her chastity and single-hearted devotion to her lord. Her story is told in the *Mahābhārata,* and she is remembered in the *Rāmāyaṇa,* but it is rather strange that her story has found little favour with the old and medieval writers. The trials and privations of Shaibyā (as in *Chaṇḍa-Kaushika*) and of Damayantī (as in *Nala-vilāsa* and *Nalābhyudaya*) are heart-rending, and indicate sacrifice for the lord and resignation to fate which beat all records. Satī, the daughter of Dakṣha, is a veritable martyr in the cause of devotion to her husband, and her spirited appreciation of what a husband is to a woman makes her annals inspiring.

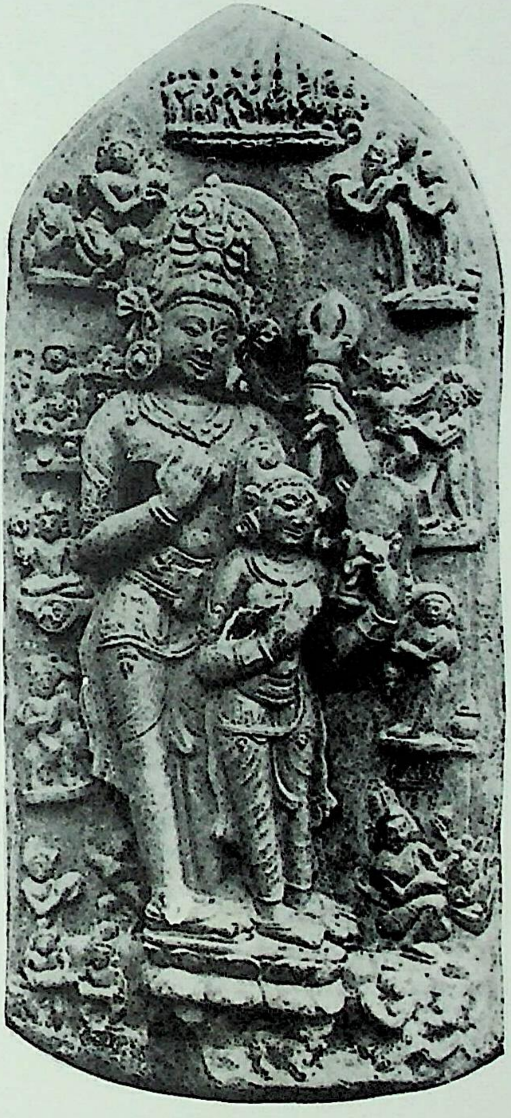
Draupadī: This brings us to Draupadī, the one undoubted heroine of the *Mahābhārata,* who in the Epics and in the Purāṇas is a composite character—one that is a challenge to the prowess of valiant princes (*vīrya-shulkā*), an apple of discord like Helen of Homer, a pawn of political jealousy and internecine hostility, one that puts an end to the Kṣhatriya tribe and, finally, one who, as the oppressed and the much tried, is the recipient of divine grace. While these aspects are not totally ignored in some classical attempts, she impresses primarily as a dignified woman who combines devotion to husband with an admirable portion of self-respect and with a bias for family prestige. Veritably a gunpowder of indomitable wrath, she is withal affectionate and forbearing when occasion demands, and commands the respect of the reader to a degree hardly equalled by any other woman in literature. Her efforts in the momentous preparation for the great Kurukṣhetra War (*Kirātārjunīya*) as also her outbursts just on the eve of its declaration (*Veṇī-saṁhāra*) are indeed wonderfully depicted. She is pained to see that spiritedness is virtually extinct in powerful potentates, who, under the shadow of misfortune, could turn callous and complacent on occasions when their kith and kin are treated to ignominy and contumely. While bidding a hearty send-off to her husband Arjuna, who was proceeding to acquire and master the use of divine weapons, she cannot open her eyes lest tears drop down, as that would be inauspicious, and turns forthwith to her husband with a significant look, which Arjuna treasures up as provender for his difficult journey. On the eve of the Great War she fires her heroic and impulsive husband Bhīma, who felt stung at her agony and annoyed at Yudhiṣhṭhira's inactivity, to a solemn pledge (*Veṇī-saṁhāra*):

> "Shall I not grind the Kauravas to dust
> Nor drink the blood of arrogant Duḥshāsana?
> Shall not my mace upon the thigh descend
> Of proud Duryodhana and crush him to powder?"

Contrasting Types: This picture of a Kṣhatriya lady impatient in distress is different from what we read of Kuntī in the accounts of the Purāṇas, courting in imagination dangers so that Lord Kṛiṣhṇa might appear in His infinite grace ; of Gāndhārī, who consoles herself that dangers are what had been reaped as consequences of actions and should not swerve one from equanimity ; or of princess Rājyashrī, sister to Emperor Harṣhavardhana, who in a fit of exasperation was in a mood to practise self-immolation (*Harṣha-charita*). Spiritedness coupled with suavity is manifest in Subhadrā (*Subhadrā-Dhanañjaya*), the wife of Arjuna and sister to Kṛiṣhṇa. This, when diluted by jealousy, is delineated in Satyabhāmā (*Pārijāta-haraṇa*). The same, when deflected by domination and intolerance at royal favour, gives rise to a character like Devayānī (*Sharmiṣhṭhā-Yayāti* and *Sharmiṣhṭhā-pariṇaya*), or like Kadru, holding sway over Vinatā, her sister and mother of Garuḍa, in consonance with the convention embodied in the great Epic. In the classical literature the senior wife not unoften dominates over the junior, who often regards herself as handmaid (*preṣhyā*) ; and this is clear in the *Mahābhārata* even in the case of Draupadī and Subhadrā. In all these instances of great women represented in classical poetry, the one is of a type in which self-love and spirit vie with each other, and the other in which gallant resignation and sweet gracefulness have blended in a manner hardly traceable in other literatures of the world.

Pārvatī: The one character that establishes this noble trait is Pārvatī, daughter of Himālaya. Firmness of resolve, steadfastness and tenacity are harmoniously adjusted in her. In her, romance loses itself in the depths of dedicated love, youth in age, passion in purity. Tender as a creeper, hard as an adamant, intensely human, supremely divine, this is what she is in her original delineation by Kālidāsa. The story is too well known to be repeated here of the divine ascetic Shiva scorning love but ultimately yielding to its humanizing influence; the myth of his temptation leading to the destruction of Kāma, the pretty love-god, as the emblem of human desire; the tale of Umā's resolve to win back by penance and renunciation what beauty and love could not achieve by their seduction; and the quaint fancy of the coming back of her lover, not in his ascetic pride, but in playful benignity. It is one of the finest stories in classical Sanskrit of the triumph of love, which is at once finely spiritual and intensely human.

Mahāshwetā: Won again by penance and holy vows is the husband of another lady, and that not before he had to reap the fruits of his impetuosity by passing through two subsequent births. The characteristic constancy and steadfastness of Umā are embodied, in a dazzling romantic canvas, in Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Mahāshwetā in the *Kādambarī,* which is unmistakably conceived on the pattern of the Madālasā story of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and probably worked out closely on the plan of the Sumānasa fable of the *Bṛihat-kathā.* Although she is the daughter of a Gandharva and an Apsaras, Mahāshwetā is human, sprightly and more attractive than the heroine of the *Kādambarī,* perhaps because of the great model of Umā. On the bank of a lovely lake called Achchhoda, where she first met her lost lover, she remains waiting and longing for reunion, which was promised to her by a divine voice. High-born as she was, she had by chance seen a beautiful ascetic Puṇḍarīka by name. This youth, enamoured of her at first sight, could not restrain himself and died a premature death with his longing unfulfilled. To her were left a *pārijāta* sheaf and a rosary as valuable relics by her lover. The poignancy of the grief turned her into an ascetic. Her lover, now born as a minister's son, comes to the lake, sees her, and being overwhelmed with passion and seized with intense pain, offers her his love, which she rejects out of loyalty to the ascetic youth, her first beloved. Annoyed at his parrotlike repetitions of love, she



KALYĀṆASUNDARA

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curses him to become a parrot. Through a cycle of rebirths he becomes at last united with her.

Shakuntalā: All these characters are more or less removed from the ordinary run of humanity. While Sītā thinks and behaves like any mortal, she is not man-born, but sprung from mother earth. Draupadī arises from the holy sacrificial fire. Umā is the daughter of the mountain that is infused and charged with divinity (*devatātman*). Mahāshwetā is a Gandharva lady. Such is not the case with Shakuntalā, the finest and the most striking specimen of romantic love. Although born of a heavenly nymph, she is essentially human. She errs, suffers, corrects herself and is elevated and transported into the galaxy of great women. She has in her very blood the ingredients of passion inherited from her mother. Environment in her case came in direct conflict with heredity. Her curt comments, primitive as well as sophisticated turns of expression, her prolonged sidelong glances, her love-malady, her sensuous love epistle, her self-denunciation at her own coyness at first meetings—all these prepare us for the catastrophe which overtakes her. Absent-mindedness on the king's departure deflects her from the duty of according due reception to a guest, and this is visited by severe punishment. Durvāsas inflicts on her a curse that is inevitable, but none the less painful:

> "That one, in thoughts of whom, to nothing else inclined
> Thou reckest not a hermit, me, arrived as guest,
> That one will not remember thee, though put in mind,
> Just as a drunken man the word he first addressed."

The king, under the influence of the ascetic's curse, disowns her in open court, dashing her hopes and crushing her reputation. But daughter of a nymph as she is, she is also the daughter of a great ascetic, and humiliation turns the coy maiden into an angry woman. But all her words are of no avail, and at last she is taken to celestial regions by her mother, the celestial nymph. The ring, the keepsake which the king presented to Shakuntalā in the hermitage, is recovered. The king is repentant, and becomes chastened and subdued. Shakuntalā, now living in the penance grove of Mārīcha, has learnt the lessons of suffering. The child—the utmost limit of affection, the most powerful link to bind parents to each other, the finest efflorescence in Kālidāsa's creed of love—is now introduced. The king amazed speaks out to himself:

> "In a dusty apparel, grey appearing
> With a face penance-impaired; with hair unknotted;
> So unkind as I was, yet chaste her bearing
> From myself parted so long, remains devoted."

The king now realizes and admits his folly of unbridled passion. The two are ultimately united, in body, mind and spirit; and the child becomes the plank on which their renewed love firmly bases itself.

Vāsavadattā: Vāsavadattā, the far-famed queen of Udayana, is the character where the recognized romantic ideal (*sachiva, sakhī, shiṣhyā*) is brought to a high level of execution. The features of sensitive pride and surrender to the cause of the husband are not clouded, but shine in her pre-eminently. There have been poets and dramatists who have brought her character into fine relief by presenting her in comparison and contrast with other queens, Padmāvatī, Sāgarikā and Priyadarshikā having been three of the most popular characters thus drawn. In two of the Trivandrum Bhāsa-plays, we have Vāsavadattā as the figure round which the whole course of events turns. Yaugandharāyaṇa's policy succeeds because of the force of circumstances and of the self-effacement of Vāsavadattā, who offered him her ungrudging aid. She reconciles herself to her new position as the trusted and respected attendant maid, in which occupation she has to weave the marriage garland of Padmāvatī and do other unwonted and difficult things. She accuses none for her ordeal of separation but relentless fate. The Samudragṛiha episode affords solace to her, proving, if any proof was necessary, that she was, as before, the king's beloved *par excellence*. Her recognition or appreciation of Padmāvatī as her valued co-wife is a thing not uncommon in literature and in history for Hindu wives of high birth and position. The mutual respect and affection of the two queens, born of Vāsavadattā's majestic demeanour and Padmāvatī's stately courtesy, no less than Vāsavadattā's dignified mode of bearing her troubles, paves the way for a happy end. Classical Sanskrit literature is replete with examples of this type of adaptability, which is in keeping with the inner promptings of constancy that had their inspiration at least from the Epic Age. Episodes like those developed round Mánoramā, Vinayavatī and Sāgarikā are apt illustrations, in some of which the amiable and accomplished rival claimant to the king's affection is no less a favourite with the reader than the main heroine.

Vasantasenā: That magnanimity is no close preserve of birth and lineage, and that a debasing environment is no impediment to what is intrinsically noble, is patent in the character of Vasantasenā presented by Bhāsa in *Daridra-Chārudatta* and by Shūdraka in *Mṛichchhakaṭika*. It has got to be recognized also that the lure of conventional romance and the profusion of seductive love accessories on the lines of the *Kāma-sūtra,* as presented in the *Mṛichchhakaṭika,* serve not to demoralize the real woman in her, and in spite of her ignoble birth she gets united at long last to her lover Chārudatta, who is by birth a Brāhmaṇa, but by profession a merchant now reduced to poverty. The high position of the courtesan is recognized not merely in the *Kāma-sūtra* but also in the *Artha-shāstra ;* and in classical Sanskrit convention these are no mean forces to reckon with. In spite of the mean and vulgar machinations of the brutal Shakāra, Vasantasenā has the satisfaction to see that her love for the Brāhmaṇa merchant, which is based on intrinsic merit, is appreciated and validated. The depositing of her ornament casket with her lover almost at the first introduction, her sincere and heart-felt inclination to religious performances, her liberality, which is evinced by her granting ransom to her chief attendant maid, her pleasure in giving full play to the motherly instinct, her reverential reference to Chārudatta's wife and the cheerful way of meeting her privations to the point of being almost beaten to death are but clear evidences of her totally uncourtesanlike leanings. To her maid's query whether she was after a prince or a potentate, she gives an emphatic reply: "My girl, it is a question of loving, not applying the trade of a courtesan." Chārudatta's boy, who plays with a little earthen toy cart and seems to be depressed because his playmates of the merchant square play with golden carts, she consoles by saying: "Don't worry, my child, you shall have a golden cart to play with." When the boy's attendant maid introduces Vasantasenā as his mother, he is not reconciled, but utters knowingly: "You are not telling me the truth. If she were my mother, she would not have such beautiful jewels." To this Vasantasenā says, "Child, your naive lips utter cruel words. . . . There now, I am your mother. Take these ornaments and have a golden cart made for you." She has seen many sordid things in life, but her mind is not debased. In spite of her vile associations she is not defiled; but rather, as the hero puts it, she is worthy of the homage that one accords to a goddess. In her, discrimination and passion are well balanced, discrimination leading to modesty and passion to steadfastness in affection.

Damayantī: We have discrimination of quite a different type, the cream of intellectual acumen, in Damayantī as portrayed in the *Naiṣhadha-charita*. This aspect of her life bearing on her deportment, just before and ending with her marriage, is not so well known; for the Damayantī who hitherto appealed is the lady that has proved her worth by her sufferings and is akin in this respect to Sītā. An earlier work, the *Nala-champū,* also deals only with this limited aspect of her life; it has also noted the sharpness of her intellect (3. 28) and her presence of mind (7. 46) as an expert in argumentative discussion; and Damayantī here is impressive, primarily because of her intellectual character. Wit and intellect predominate in her character as depicted in this artificial poem; and in all situations, whether it be the sending of a message through the swan or cleverly choosing her mate in the *swayaṁvara* ceremony where the gods create confusion, the fineness of her intellectual acumen, with its conceits and ingenuities, adds a zest to an otherwise romantic and sentimental story.

Other Types: While intelligence and wit may be cultivated and exercised, in actual practice, wisdom, sedateness and dignified conduct can come only through reflection on the experience of life. They may be the outcome of training and instruction, but not always. Even well-digested knowledge, when used for academic discussion, may dazzle us in Shāradā (or Ubhayabhāratī as she is popularly called), the talented wife of Maṇḍana Mishra, the philosopher (*Shaṅkara-digvijaya*). Avantisundarī, the accomplished princely wife of the poet-critic Rājashekhara, was a marvel in whom self-sufficiency and opinionativeness seem to get the better of sobriety and wisdom.

Practical wisdom aided by bookish knowledge may be useful, especially when it is applied, even though in a philanthropic spirit, to further lowly ends such as intriguing love negotiations, as we have in the case of the tender-hearted Buddhist nun Kāmandakī (*Mālatī-Mādhava*). What to say of others, the goddess Saraswatī even, when she was puffed up with her load of learning, had to suffer (*Harṣha-charita*) from the operation of a curse as her punishment. Anasūyā, the gentle and appreciative wife of the sage Atri, with her long years of penance and service to her husband, and Lopāmudrā, the contented wife of Agastya, with her rigid adherence to the rightful course of life, fail to inspire us much. The one character that stands pre-eminent for all time by virtue of her modesty, brilliance and compassion, and in which wisdom and knowledge combine to produce unqualified good to all (*trilokī-maṅgalya*), is Arundhatī as depicted in the *Kumāra-sambhava* and the *Uttara-Rāma-charita*. With her lovely eyes fixed upon her spouse Vasiṣhṭha, she is ever by his side: "The saint shone like the sacred Fire, she like Swāhā (Fire's wife)." As a skilful matron, it is her task to establish marital union of the gods and men and seal it with her authoritative approval. She knows that "Virtue is the object of reverence, not sex nor age," and extends to Sītā her heart-felt adoration. Arundhatī is great with a heart soft as a flower and a will firm as adamant. In *Lalita-Mādhava* Arundhatī, great with her older association and her chaste company, blesses Rādhā and testifies to her chastity ; and this is the ultimate objective of many a classical composition like *Kalaṅka-mochana* framed on the lines of Vaiṣhṇava tradition.

Rādhā: The Vaiṣhṇava poets and devotees, acting on the suggestive hints of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* give a new colour and orientation to the old passionate story of Rādhā and Kṛiṣhṇa. The philosopher's enumeration of the eight nooses (*pāsha*) comprises shame (*lajjā*), family prestige (*kula*), purity of conduct and character (*shīla*), the three great impediments to Rādhā in the course of her love. It is a fact that while verses about the love of Rādhā and Kṛiṣhṇa—or for the matter of that of Kṛiṣhṇa and the *gopīs* (milk-maids)—speak of Rādhā's personal charms and present a picture of sensuous enjoyment, the emphasis in the outstanding later works lies on the treatment of the theme in the context of separation and suffering. Kṛiṣhṇa's yearning while in Dwārakā for the pleasant days passed on the banks of Yamunā with Rādhā and the *gopīs* is understandable and natural; but in later literature the yearning more often is that of Rādhā, who pines in separation for the ever youthful and sportive Kṛiṣhṇa. The devotee in her cries out in rapture, "Lord, my love, ever kind and restless in drawing me, your devotee, away from danger, when shall you be in the field of my vision" (*Kṛiṣhṇa-karṇāmṛita*). She treasures up the memory of herself in his company, especially during the *rāsa* sport (*Ānanda-Vṛindāvana-champū*), wherein are manifested his majesty and amiability as he nodded gracefully to the entreaties of his beloved ladies. The love of *Kṛiṣhṇa* is more virulent than poison and sweeter than nectar (*Vidagdha-Mādhava*). Her union with Kṛiṣhṇa, her merging in him, the be-all and end-all of love's poetry and philosophy, is what hypnotized Chaitanya. Kṛiṣhṇa is perplexed and pleasingly annoyed at his discovery of his own form being attractive and perennially attracting as an entrancing stream of sweetness (*mādhuryapūra*) hitherto undiscovered.

This ennobling picture of the role of woman in man's discovery of himself and thereby of womanly greatness is one of emotional abandon, the hearty contribution of religious devotion (*bhakti*) to human thought. Akin to this is the substitution of the relish (*līlā*) of daily service by that of patient and confident waiting for His grace to alight and enlighten, just as the pattern of Umā is to Mahāshwetā. The Siddha-Shabarī of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, eulogized in the *Uttara-Rāma-charita* and analysed in the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa,* is the literary prototype for this. Another way is through knowledge acquired from the preceptor and through self-realization attendant thereon. Scriptural texts bear testimony to the fact that a woman led by her inquisitiveness and earnestness qualifies for it. The illustrious example of Maitreyī's imploring her husband for instruction is familiar. Kapila discoursing on *bhakti*-yoga to his mother Devahūti, in response to her earnestness, also approximates to this.

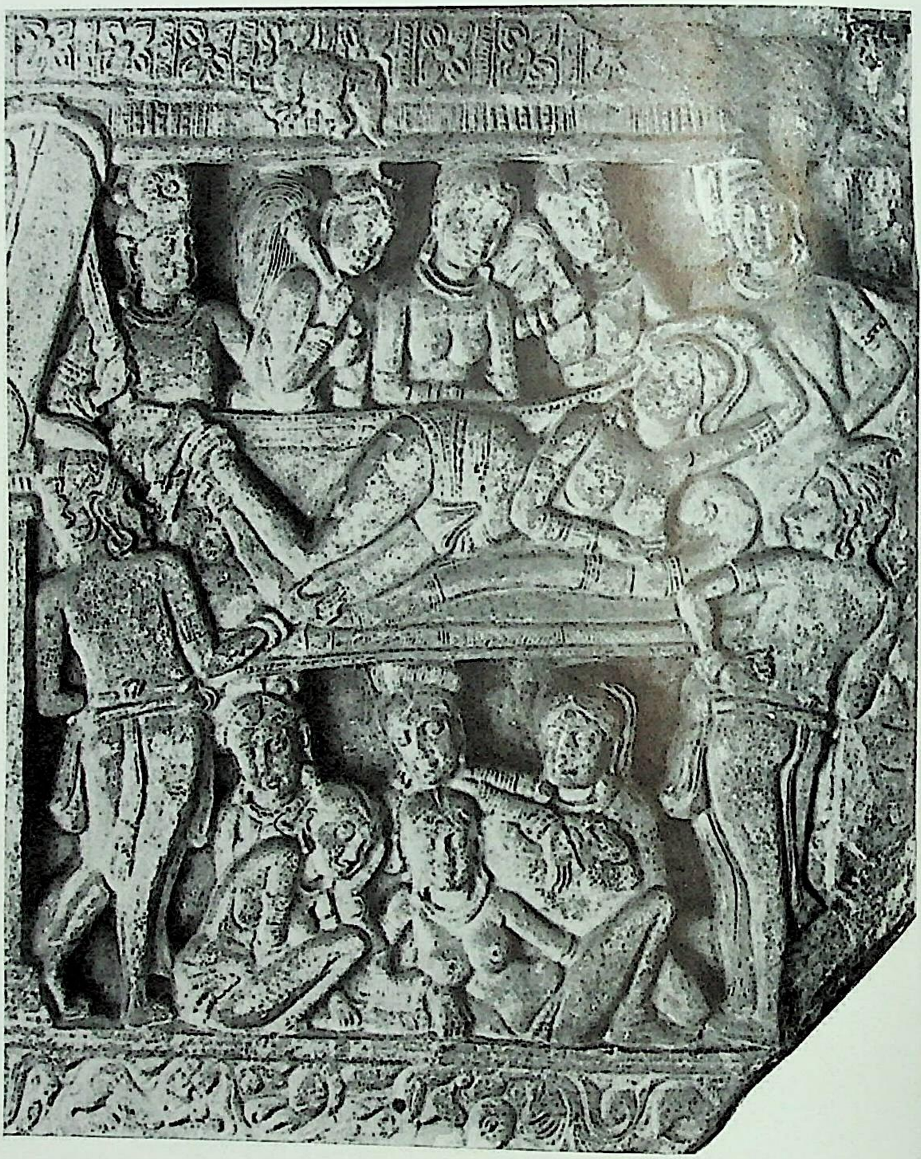
Chūḍālā: While examples are but too common in literature where woman damps and crushes such an interest in her beloved (e.g. Sundarī in the *Saundarananda*), we have an outstanding example of a woman striving for such a contingency, triumphing over temptations of the flesh, instructing him in self-knowledge and winning him over to her ways. This is Chūḍālā of the *Yoga-vāsiṣhṭha.* Daughter of a Saurāṣhṭra prince, beautiful and pious, she was while in her teens wedded to Shikhidhwaja, a valiant prince of Ujjayinī. It was a happy match, and life passed on smoothly with them, since both were accomplished in arts and sciences and were of kindred tastes. But with the advent of age and with her personal charms diminishing, she realized the necessity of true knowledge and the hollowness of material pleasure. With her mind trained by instructions, Chūḍālā asks herself the question: "Can it be that I shall know my own self, the substratum of reality in me, what I am in thinking and feeling and willing?" Upon her dawns the knowledge that the world of senses is imaginary. With this she feels the touch of unparalleled comeliness overspreading her appearance. The king is surprised and interrogates: "Have you tasted nectar and turned unaging? Meseems you have acquired a priceless treasure." She replies: "I have come to know of things in their proper perspective—their emergence from and their merging in finality. I pray for nothing and am self-contained. That is why I have turned so lovely." The king laughs at the idea and takes her to be mad, and entreats her not to sever her connection with the world of senses. But that was not to be, Chūḍālā takes to solitude and yogic regimen, acquires supernatural powers, but does not leave the palace. In course of time knowledge dawns on the king too. He turns religiously minded and leaves his kingdom and takes to the forest abruptly in spite of Chūḍālā's repeated entreaties. Chūḍālā, invisible through yogic efficacy, seeks him out after he had been absent for eighteen years. By this time, with his previous desire for enjoyment exhausted, he becomes a true ascetic. Chūḍālā implores the king to be thorough-going in his renunciation, to eschew everything including the inborn impressions of his previous birth. This done, the king becomes really enlightened (*prabuddha*); and this is the marvel that Chūḍālā achieves.

3. CONCLUSION

The sublimation of the intellect as in Arundhatī, of feeling as in Rādhā, and of spirit as in Chūḍālā are three important landmarks in the process of womanly enlightenment as depicted in classical

Sanskrit. The mission of preserving the honour of women and saving the country in its crisis, and of fighting for it or of leading a fight is seen in the case of the courtesan Vīrā who, sent by the enemy to seduce with her charms the patriotic hero from his goal but converted into his code of patriotic conduct, disguised herself later as a saint (*tāpasī*) for achieving this.

Women as martyrs in religion appear rarely in Buddhistic doctrinaire accounts, but women as nuns wedded to service of humanity and to the ways of monasticism are more frequent. The one noble example of affection through service is Patralekhā in the *Kādambarī*. She is the best example of companionship unfeigned and undaunted by the dawn and return of love. Cases like these are laudable exceptions. While the woman is not generally prone "to haunt, to startle and waylay," and is "a spirit still, and bright with something of an angelic light," it must be admitted that her role "to warn, to comfort and command" is hardly ever seriously attempted; and the reason for this omission is to be discovered in the classical writers' sticking faithfully to the *shāstric* ideal of her being ever in the control of another and not striving to become forward and self-willed. Woman may be a poet, a philosopher, a scholar, and even a *brahmavādinī* like Maitreyī or Chūḍālā, but she should not present herself in assemblies making a demonstration of her genius. A woman may be learned, but should not be forward. Her claim to recognition lies through her service of her lord and through her being the mother of a great son, wise or valiant like Rāma, Shaṅkara, Chaitanya or the heroic Bharata, as the case may be. This is the attitude even of romantic love stories. Vāsavadattā is great because of her being the mother of Naravāhanadatta.



MĀYĀ'S DREAM

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CHAPTER XII

GREAT WOMEN IN BUDDHISM

1. General Observations

In a conservative country like India, the position of women in the Buddhist period could not have changed very much from that of the earlier days. Nevertheless, there was some improvement in their condition, due primarily to the basic principles which Buddha laid down in his teachings. These may be briefly stated as follows:

(*i*) Buddha laid stress on the fact that a woman, like a man, reaps the fruits of her past karma, and that she must depend on her own acts for her future good or evil or salvation, and in this none can help her, not even her parents, teacher or spiritual preceptor. This struck at the root of the belief that a son was needed for the safe passage of an individual after death to heaven. Hence the futility of the invidious distinction made between a son and a daughter in the pre-Buddhist period became obvious to the people, and this ultimately raised the status of a daughter.

(*ii*) Secondly, Buddha discarded the Brāhmaṇic rituals in which the wife played a secondary part and a barren woman or a widow had no place. This did away with the unwarranted stigma attached to these two categories of unfortunate women.

(*iii*) Thirdly, Buddha made no distinction between a man and a woman regarding the attainment of spiritual ends. He delivered discourses for the benefit of both the sexes, and the moral code prescribed by him was to be observed by both. Hence the lower position of women in the sphere of spiritual culture was done away with, and this has been amply evidenced by the several nuns attaining the highest goal, nirvana.

(*iv*) The order of nuns was open to married as well as unmarried women, irrespective of whether they were barren or not, as also to widows. There was no distinction between one category and another when they became either *shramaṇerīs* or *bhikṣhuṇīs*. It is spiritual advancement alone that counted in the *saṅgha*. Even a courtesan was admitted to the order of nuns, and after ordination no disrespect was shown to her for her past career. Buddha gladly accepted the invitation of Ambapālī for meals, much to the chagrin and discomfiture of the rich Lichchhavis. He accepted her mango grove and admitted her to the order without the least hesitation. Similar treatment was accorded to a few other courtesans who joined the order.

(*v*) The education given to female novices and nuns was not different from that imparted to their male counterparts. The female lay devotees also received their training in the principles of Buddhism. The nuns were initiated into the deepest problems of philosophy as also into the subtle mystical experiences attainable through intense meditative exercises. There are instances of *bhikṣhuṇīs* reciting the texts and elucidating the deep problems of the Buddhist philosophy.

Though it is claimed that the status of women was raised in the Buddhist period, it cannot but be admitted that in the monastic order the place accorded to the nuns was lower than that of the monks. Some of the restrictions imposed on nuns might have been necessary for their physical weakness, but there are a few which cannot reasonably be justified. The restrictions were as follows:

(*i*) A *bhikṣhuṇī*, though of a long standing, must bow before a *bhikṣhu* ordained much later than her. This condition was resented by Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, a queen and a mother, but she had to yield to the adamantine will of the Teacher.

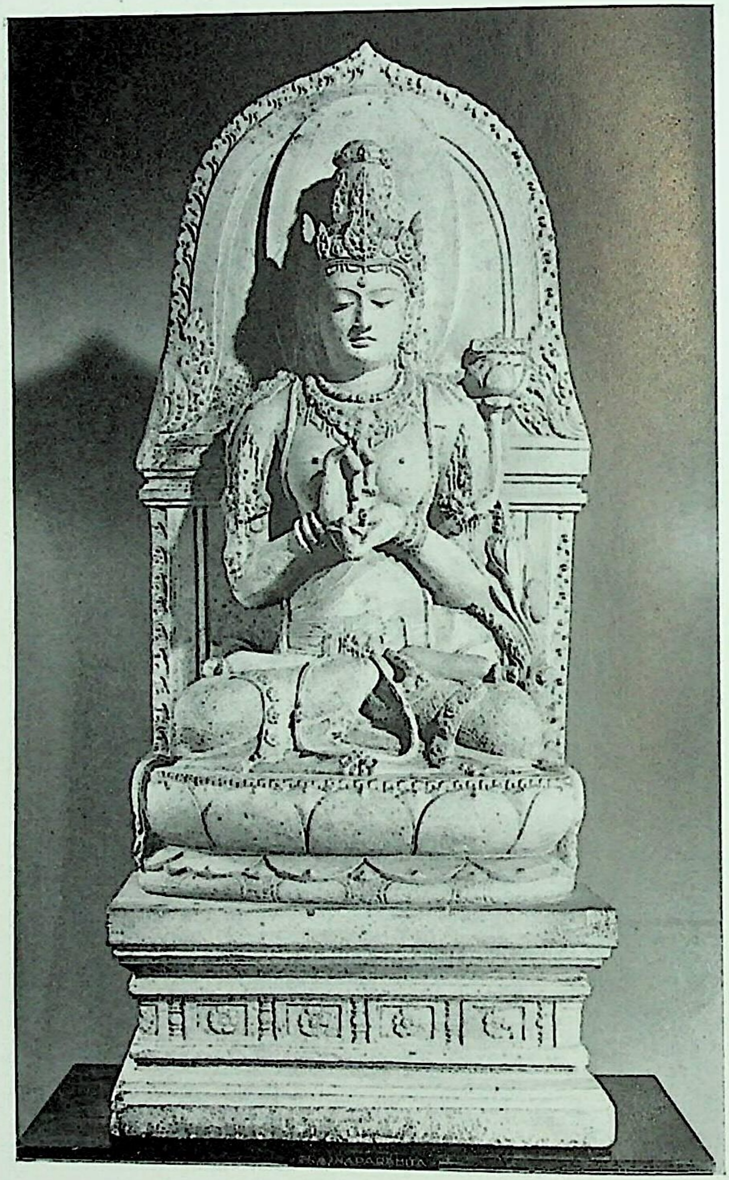
(*ii*) A *bhikṣhuṇī* was not allowed to spend the rainy season (*varṣhāvāsa*) in a place where there was no *bhikṣhu*.

(*iii*) At the termination of *varṣhāvāsa*, a *bhikṣhuṇī* had to confess her faults, if any, before both the *saṅghas* of monks and nuns.

(*iv*) In order to fix the date of the fortnightly assembly (*uposatha*) and exhortation (*ovāda*), a *bhikṣhuṇī* must take the necessary directions from a monk.

(*v*) A nun had to seek absolution of certain offences from both the *saṅghas*.

(*vi*) A nun seeking higher ordination must have the sanction of both the *saṅghas*.



PRAJNAPARAMITA

PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ

Courtesy: Kern Institute, Leiden, Holland (*vii*) A nun could in no circumstances admonish a monk, while any monk could admonish a nun.

(*viii*) A nun must never abuse a monk.

Buddha at first was averse to the admission of women into his system, but when it was pointed out to him that such refusal of ordination to women clashed with his basic principle that only an individual could help himself or herself in achieving salvation, he agreed to the formation of the order of nuns. He realized that though on principle both men and women should be placed on the same footing, there were chances of abuse by those who were in the lower stages of spiritual culture. The restrictions stated above were actually meant for the nuns under training, and could not have applied to a *bhikṣhuṇī* who had attained one of the four fruits of sanctification. Celibacy, austerity and strict mental discipline were the key-notes of Buddhism. Hence the existence of the orders of monks and nuns was a source of great anxiety to Buddha, and this led him to make the rules governing the life of nuns so stringent.

Buddhism was primarily a religion for recluses, male or female, and hence the women who became famous in Buddhist history were mostly those who rose to the highest stage of spiritual culture known as *arhathood*.

Sources: The only Pali text which throws any light on the spiritual achievements of women is the *Therī-gāthā,* a small text containing only five hundred and twenty-two stanzas said to have been uttered by several nuns giving expression to their joy at the attainment of the highest goal, nirvana. The commentary *Paramattha-dīpanī* on this text furnishes us with biographical accounts of the *therīs* (senior nuns), but many of them seem to have been drawn from imagination. There is another commentary *Manoratha-pūraṇī* on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya,* in which appears a list of the foremost *therīs* (nuns), *shramaṇerīs* (female novices), and *upāsikās* (female lay devotees). The commentary offers a biographical sketch of each of these female notables, and the sketches are similar in nature to those in the *Paramattha-dīpanī.*

We shall now relate a few typical accounts of the lives of women who attained distinction in the history of Buddhism.

2. NUNS

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī: Mahāpajāpatī was born as a daughter of Suppabuddha at the Shākyan village of Devadaha. She was the younger sister of Mahāmāyā, mother of Siddhārtha Gautama. Both the sisters, when grown up, were married to King Shuddhodana. Queen Mahāmāyā died seven days after the birth of Siddhārtha, and her sister Mahāpajāpatī took charge of her child and nursed him as her own. After Mahāmāyā's death, Mahāpajāpatī became the chief queen. She gave birth to a son called Nanda and a daughter called Sundarīnandā. She entrusted the care of her children to the nurses, and she herself reared Siddhārtha Gautama.

After the attainment of *bodhi* (illumination), Gautama Buddha paid a visit to Kapilāvastu and delivered a few discourses. After listening to them King Shuddhodana became a lay convert, attaining the first stage of sanctification known as *srota-āpanna* (placed in the stream leading to nirvana), while Nanda, son of Mahāpajāpatī, and Rāhula joined the order of monks. After the death of King Shuddhodana she became very dejected and determined to renounce the worldly life. At this time a quarrel broke out between the Shākyans and the Koliyans for drawing water from the river Rohiṇī. This ended in a disastrous fight between the two clans, bringing about the loss of many lives. With Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, the widows of the dead Shākyan warriors sallied forth from their homes with the firm determination to become recluses. She approached Buddha, who was then residing at Vaishālī, and sought for his permission to join the order of Buddhist recluses. On a previous occasion a similar request of hers was turned down by the Teacher; so this time Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her five hundred companions had their hair cut, put on yellow robes and then went to Vaishālī to obtain the permission of the Teacher. Buddha at first was very unwilling to form the order of nuns, but he could not turn down the reasonable request of Ānanda to give women opportunities equal to those of men in order to attain salvation. He at last permitted the women to become Buddhist nuns on eight conditions as stated above. Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī after ordination took to meditational exercises under the direct supervision of the great Teacher and soon attained perfection. She lived up to the age of one hundred and twenty and was declared by the Teacher as the oldest and the most experienced of ordained nuns (*rattaññunaṁ*). Buddha did not show any special consideration to her. It is said that on one occasion he refused to accept the excellent robe made by her from extraordinary materials and thereby disappointed her very much, and even Ānanda's intercession on her behalf was of no avail; he directed her to offer the gift to the *saṅgha* as a whole. But Buddha paid her visits when she was on her death-bed, and gave suitable discourses after altering the rule that a monk must not go near the bed of a sick nun.

The greatest achievement of Mahāpajāpatī was to secure Buddha's consent for the formation of the order of nuns in the Buddhist system, and it was at her instance that several rules were framed for the disciplinary guidance of nuns, which were known as *Bhikṣhuṇī-prātimokṣha-sūtra*. The *Therī-gāthā* attributes to her a few *gāthās*, in which she offered her respects to Buddha saying that he had saved many a being from worldly sufferings, and that because of him she herself had been able to put an end to her thirst, the source of all miseries. She practised the eightfold path and realized that her present body was the last one of innumerable such she had previously had as mother, son, father, brother, grandmother, etc. She also realized that she would have no more rebirth, since she was energetic and had put in all her efforts to end her worldly existence. It was really for the benefit of many that Mahāmāyā had given birth to the child Gautama, who had shown the path to countless beings as to how to end their sufferings—in these words she offered her salutations to the great Teacher.

Kṣhemā: Kṣhemā was born at Sāgala in the royal family of the Madrās. When grown up, she had an exquisite appearance with a complexion like molten gold. In course of time she was married to King Bimbisāra and lived at Rājagṛiha as the chief queen. At that time the Teacher resided at Veluvana, the royal garden, given away by the king to the Buddhist *saṅgha*. Queen Kṣhemā came to know that Buddha condemned infatuation with one's own personal beauty, and so she preferred to remain away from him and thus avoid being criticized for her love for beautiful appearance. The King deliberated within himself that as he was the chief lay supporter of Buddha, it was not proper that his chief queen should not approach the Teacher to listen to his discourses. So he instructed his bards to sing about the charms of the Veluvana within the hearing of the queen, so that her curiosity might be roused for the beauties of the garden, and ultimately she would be taken there. The plan had its desired effect. The queen expressed her desire to see the garden and sought the permission of the king, who granted it with the request that she should pay homage to the Teacher while visiting the garden. She, however, did not give any reply, but proceeded in her royal chariot to the garden. The king instructed the men accompanying the queen to persuade her to pay her respects to Buddha, but in case they failed to do so, they were directed to take her in some way or other to Buddha's presence. The queen, after amusing herself in the garden for the whole day, wanted to return to the palace without seeing the Teacher. Much against her wish, the men escorted her to Buddha, who in the meantime magically created a woman of exquisite beauty and made her fan him with a palm leaf. The queen was taken aback at the beauty of this woman, felt that she was not worthy of being even her maidservant and regretted her vanity. She stood there amazed observing the charms of the woman, when the Teacher changed her into a middle-aged one, then into an old woman and ultimately made her fall down on the ground with the fan in her hand. On account of her accumulated merits in previous lives, Queen Kṣhemā began to ponder over the fact that every body must pass through these stages, when she heard the Teacher uttering the verse: "Those who are given to attachment fall into the stream (of repeated existences), like the spider (caught) in the net created by itself. One who has no attachment gets rid of his sufferings and goes out by tearing asunder (the net)"—(*Dhammapada,* 347).

On listening to this utterance, the queen obtained *arhathood* (perfection) then and there, but as one cannot remain an *arhat* as a householder, she decided to take ordination at once. On her return to the palace, the king inquired if she had seen the Teacher. In reply she said that what the king had seen of the Teacher was negligible; it was the real Teacher that she had visualized. She then asked for his permission to become a *bhikṣhuṇī,* which the king gave with his whole heart and sent her to the nunnery in a golden palanquin. In course of time she became very learned in the *shāstras,* and so Buddha gave her a very high place among the vastly learned *therīs.*

In the stanzas attributed to her in the *Therī-gāthā,* Kṣhemā relates that a young man of excellent appearance wanted to entice her with worldly enjoyment, but she spurned his proposal saying that what were pleasures to him pierced her like a sharp dart. She was sick of her physical body, a storehouse of diseases having only a fleeting existence. She had acquired perfection in knowledge and had crushed all her desires for worldly matters. She had reached the goal by following the instructions of the Enlightened One, and not by worshipping the stars and kindling sacrificial fires in the forest.

On one occasion, when she was staying in a hermitage near Shrāvastī, King Prasenajit was looking for a teacher with whom he could have some philosophical discussions. He was apprised of the presence of Bhikṣhuṇī Kṣhemā, as one vastly learned and proficient in the exposition of abstruse doctrines, in the hermitage of Toraṇavatthu. The king approached her respectfully and put the question whether the perfect Tathāgata existed after death or not. Bhikṣhuṇī Kṣhemā said that a question like this should be left aside, since it was as absurd as attempting to count the drops of water in an ocean. She explained to the king that the Tathāgata after death, could not be located by material ingredients (*rūpa*) or feeling (*vedanā*) or constituents which composed a being; hence the question of his location after death could not arise. She added that such questions had been treated by the Teacher as indeterminable. This exposition satisfied the king, who was highly impressed by her erudition.

Paṭāchārā: She was born in the family of a banker of Shrāvastī. When grown up, she fell in love with an employee of her father and kept this love affair secret. Her father, however, selected a young man of equal family status and proposed her marriage with him. To avert this unwelcome situation, the girl one night eloped with her lover, went to a village near by and lived there. At the time of the birth of their first child, she wanted to return to her father's house, but she was dissuaded by her husband. After some time, when she was going to have her second child, she determined to go back to her father, overriding the will of her husband. On the way, however, she gave birth to the child, and her husband hurried to the near-by jungle for collecting some straw and reed to make a shelter for the mother and child. To the misfortune of all, the young man was bitten by a snake when he was collecting the straw and died then and there. The girl waited and waited and at last in despair went in search of him and found him dead. She was dumbfounded at the sight and returned to her crying children. Grief-stricken as she was, she started for her father's place with her two children, one in her arms and the other holding her fingers.

On her way, there was an overflowing stream which she had to ford, and she was at a loss how to do it with her two children. She planned to ford the stream with one child at a time. Leaving the older child on the bank, she crossed the stream with the baby. She placed the baby on a stone, covered it with grass and was returning to fetch the other child. When she was in mid-stream a hawk swooped on the baby. To drive it away she waved her hands, but the older child thought that he was being called by his mother and so he got down into the stream and was carried away by the current. Thus she lost her husband and both the children, and on reaching her destination she learnt that her parents and brother also had died the previous night by the crashing of the house and were being burnt on the same pyre. At this she lost her nerves and became insane.

One day she was noticed by Buddha when he was delivering a discourse to an assembly. She was brought to her senses by the Teacher by the exercise of his extraordinary powers. She then properly covered her body, approached Buddha and related to him her endless sufferings. He consoled her saying that she had shed tears on the death of her dear ones in countless previous existences also, and that if those tears could be collected, they would make four seas. He then told her that no son or daughter or other relative could render any help to a person after death; no blood relation would come to one's aid in mitigating one's sufferings. Realizing this hard fact, one should try to become wise by following the path chalked out by the Buddha. Paṭāchārā, after listening to these words, became a *srota-āpanna* (placed in the stream leading to nirvana) and expressed her desire to join the order of nuns. She was duly ordained and made a *bhikṣhuṇī*.

One day, after washing her feet, she observed that the water flowed to a certain extent and then disappeared. She poured water again and observed its course till its disappearance. She realized therefrom how life was transitory. She then listened to a discourse in which Buddha explained that all beings were subject to death, and therefore it should be the aim of every being to see that the five constituents did not combine to form another perishable body for him. She meditated over these words of Buddha and soon attained perfection, the *arhathood.* She expressed her joy in these words: A man ploughs his field, sows seed therein and thus earns wealth to maintain his wife and sons; why then should she not attain nirvana by observing the moral precepts and following the teachings of Buddha? She declared that she had obtained control over her thoughts by meditating on the course of water poured on the ground. One night she took a lamp, seated herself on the bed and with the help of a needle smothered the burning wick within the oil. By observing this her mind became completely emancipated.

Paṭāchārā became proficient in the disciplinary rules (*vinaya*) and was praised by Buddha as the foremost of the female *vinaya*-reciters. Her name Paṭāchārā—*paṭu* (proficient) in *āchāra* (duties)—was very likely given for her strict adherence to the *vinaya* rules. She trained thirty nuns and guided them in the way in which she had attained perfection. It is said that all the thirty nuns obtained higher powers and destroyed their ignorance.

Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakeshā: Bhaddā or Subhaddā, was born at Rājagṛiha in the family of a very rich banker. On the day of her birth a son was born to the priest of the realm. He was named Sattuka. From his very childhood Sattuka developed a strong tendency for stealing, and when quite young, he used to steal whatever articles he could lay his hands on. He could not be corrected by his parents in spite of their best efforts. At last, when he was grown up, they turned him out of their house. From that day onward, with the help of a hook and a rope he stealthily climbed into the upper storeys of houses and stole as much property as he could manage. He made such attempts on almost every house in the town. The matter drew the attention of the king, who ordered his town guard to arrest him at any cost under the threat of punishment. The town guard alerted his subordinates and was able to arrest Sattuka along with the stolen articles. The thief was placed before the king, who sentenced him to death by a fall from the appointed cliff. He was severely beaten and was being taken to the cliff, when he was seen by the banker's daughter Subhaddā.

Strangely enough, Subhaddā at first sight fell in love with Sattuka, and prevailed upon her parents to save his life and get her married to him. She being his only daughter, the father bribed the town guard, who released Sattuka secretly and killed another person in his place to satisfy the king.

Sattuka was brought to the banker's house and was fed and clothed most luxuriously. He was taken to Subhaddā, who also adorned herself with all her precious ornaments and received him with due honour. Sattuka, however, set his thoughts upon those ornaments and began to devise a plan to steal them. After a few days, when Subhaddā was seated near him comfortably, Sattuka told her that he had something very secret to disclose to her. This confidence of Sattuka pleased Subhaddā very much, and she readily agreed to carry out his wishes. Sattuka then told her that he had taken a vow at the time of his death sentence that if by any means his life was saved, he would make offerings to the presiding deity of the death-cliff, and this worship he wanted to offer in her company. Subhaddā made all the necessary preparations for making the offerings. She put on her best ornaments, and both of them proceeded in a vehicle to the cliff. Sattuka left the men at the foot of the hill and asked Subhaddā alone to carry the offerings. When ascending the hill, he made some unkind remarks to Subhaddā, who thereupon found out his real intention. When on the top of the hill, Sattuka asked Subhaddā to put her ornaments on a piece of cloth and make a bundle. When she protested, he disclosed his real intention. At this Subhaddā said that not only the ornaments belonged to him but her person also, and she further said that she was one with him and had no interest apart from him. Before taking off the ornaments, she said she would once embrace him from the front and then from the back. This was agreed to by Sattuka. After embracing him from the front, Subhaddā proceeded to embrace him from the back, when she pushed him down the cliff and sent him to his destiny. The gods thereupon uttered some verses saying that men are not necessarily wise in all circumstances; there are also women who are wise and intelligent.

After this incident, Subhaddā did not think it proper to return home; she made up her mind to become a recluse and practise rigorous asceticism. She joined the order of Nirgranthas by taking ordination in proper form. Her hairs were removed by the petiole of a palm leaf, but hairs again came out in curly heaps, for which she was given the appellation of Kuṇḍala-keshā (curly-haired). She studied there various subjects, particularly dialectics. She then visited different places where renowned teachers lived, and learnt from them the art of disputation along with other sciences. She became a great disputant and found none who could join issue with her. Wherever she went, she would make a sand heap, fix on it a *jambu* branch, and announce to the people residing near that any one who dared to enter into disputation with her was invited to trample upon the *jambu* branch. For seven days she would wait, and then, if none came forward, she would depart from the place with the branch. In this way she reached Shrāvastī, where Buddha was residing at the time. As usual, she put up the sand heap with the *jambu* branch and waited there for disputation. The sand heap was noticed by Buddha's chief disciple Sāriputta, who, on learning the object of it from the boys standing near by, trampled upon it. When Subhaddā learnt that she had been challenged by Sāriputta, she collected her friends and admirers and with a large following proceeded to debate with Sāriputta, who was then taking rest after meals. Sāriputta gave her the option to put questions, which she did, and all of them were answered by him very quickly. When her questions were exhausted, Sāriputta put to her only one question, which she failed to answer. She then acknowledged him as her master. She was taken to Buddha, who delivered to her a suitable discourse, which opened her eyes, and she shortly attained perfection.

She then expressed her deep gratitude to Buddha in these words: She with her hair plucked out used to wander about wearing one piece of cloth and covering her body with dust. She discarded what was right and practised what was wrong. In the afternoon she met Buddha on Gṛidhrakūṭa Mount, and there saluted him with bent knees. Buddha gave her the ordination with two words, "Come, lady." For fifty years she roamed about in Aṅga, Magadha, Vajji, Kāshī and Kosala living on alms. She would not consider herself in debt to the givers of alms, since she knew that great merit was assured to them who had been charitable to her.

Ambapālī (Āmrapālī): She was found in the mango garden of the Shākyan noble Mahānāma, a rich citizen of Vaishālī. One day when Mahānāma was amusing himself along with the members of his family in his pleasure garden, a newly-born babe was found there by his gardener. Mahānāma, who was childless, welcomed the baby and handed her over to his wife, who reared her amid pomp and luxury as her own daughter. When the baby grew up, she became exquisitely beautiful, and her hand was coveted by the sons of rich people. Mahānāma was placed in a dilemma in selecting a suitable bridegroom for his adopted daughter, for he knew he would be incurring the displeasure of those whom he would refuse ; then again, he was bound by custom to marry his daughter to a young man of the clan. He therefore decided to call a meeting of the Assembly of the Lichchhavis and place the proposal of his daughter's marriage before it. The members expressed their desire to have a look at the girl, so Mahānāma brought her to the Assembly. The members were struck with amazement at her beauty and decided unanimously that she should be enjoyed by all (*gaṇa-bhogyā*). This decision was a great shock to the father, who could not think of his daughter becoming a courtesan. The decision of the Assembly, however, could not be disobeyed, and so he felt nonplussed. The daughter came to his rescue and agreed to abide by the decision, much against his will. She asked for five conditions to be fulfilled by the Assembly. These were as follows: (i) she should be provided with a house in the best locality of the city ; (ii) only one person would be entitled to enter into her premises at a time ; (iii) her fee would be 500 *kārṣhāpaṇas* ; (iv) her house could be inspected on the seventh day in case of a general search for an enemy or a culprit ; and (v) there should be no watch over persons coming in or going out of her house. The Assembly accepted all the conditions.

Ambapālī then selected a house in the best locality. She had the walls of her house painted by an artist with the portraits of kings, ministers, nobles, rich bankers and traders. While scanning the portraits, she became enamoured of the portrait of King Bimbisāra and became very anxious to meet him. King Bimbisāra also got the information that Ambapālī had a nymphlike appearance, and became very curious about her. At that time the political relation between the Lichchhavis and the Magadhan king was much strained, and so King Bimbisāra was warned that he should not take the risk of entering into his enemy's territory. He, however, did not listen to any counsel and proceeded with his general Gopa to the house of Ambapālī in Vaishālī. It is said that the Lichchhavis came to know of the presence of an enemy in their territory and started a search of all the houses, but they were unable to search the house of Ambapālī without a notice of seven days. King Bimbisāra could therefore stay safely in her house for six days, and Ambapālī conceived during that time. The king thereupon gave her a finger-ring tied in a thin piece of cloth as a royal token in case she needed any help for the child. After nine months Ambapālī gave birth to a son. The child grew up into a sturdy boy, but he was often derided by his playmates as being an illegitimate child and the son of a maidservant. His position became intolerable, and so he was sent to King Bimbisāra, who recognized him as one of his sons. In course of time he became a Buddhist monk known as Vimala Kondañña.

Ambapālī plied her trade and amassed huge wealth. She became a lay devotee of Buddha and hurried to pay her respects to him when he reached Koṭigāma near Vaishālī in his last journey. She listened to the discourse delivered by the Teacher for her benefit, and invited him along with his disciples to her house for the forenoon meal. The acceptance of her invitation by Buddha disappointed the Lichchhavis, who came in a body to invite him. On the following day Ambapālī served food to Buddha and his party to her entire satisfaction, and at the end of it offered her mango garden with its buildings to the *bhikṣhu saṅgha*. This gift was also accepted by the Teacher.

Some time after this, one day she listened to a discourse delivered by her son Vimala, and made up her mind to become a *bhikṣhuṇī*. Not long after her ordination she obtained insight into the truth. Observing the changes that came upon her once beautiful physique at the advanced age, she realized the impermanence of worldly existence and attained *arhathood*. She gave expression to her mind in verses.

Isidāsī: Isidāsī was born in the family of a pious rich banker of Ujjayinī. She was the only child of her father and was brought up with great care. When she came of age, she was married to the son of a very respectable banker of Sāketa, and got at the time of her marriage many valuable presents from her husband's family. As instructed by her parents, she saluted her father-in-law and mother-in-law every morning and evening. She was all attention to the sisters of her husband. She would take care of whatever food and drinks there were in the house, and distribute them to the members of the family according to their needs. She would attend her husband punctiliously, cook for him and serve him in every way; but in spite of all her efforts she could not please him. She incurred his displeasure so much that he threatened to leave the house if he was to live with her under the same roof. His parents reasoned with him and pleaded for the poor wife, whom they found hard-working and very good in nature, but they failed to change his mind. They inquired of Isidāsī if she knew the reasons for such displeasure of their son, but she also pleaded ignorance of any fault on her part. At last she had to leave her husband's home and return to her own parents at Ujjayinī. Her father got her married for the second time with another young man not so rich as her former husband. This time also she rendered service to her husband and the members of his family to the best of her ability. But she could not satisfy them, and at last had to leave that house also and return to her parents.

At such repeated misfortune of his daughter, her father persuaded a young recluse of good nature to give up his yellow dress and begging bowl, and marry his daughter. After this marriage they lived as husband and wife for barely fifteen days when her husband felt disgusted with the worldly life and wanted to revert to his life as a recluse. Her father became greatly disappointed and advised her to lead a religious life at home. At this time she came across Bhikṣhuṇī Jinadattā, who paid a visit to her house, and prayed to her for admission into the order of nuns. In spite of her parents' protest she retired, and was ordained by Jinadattā as a nun. Soon after ordination she attained the highest knowledge and came to know her past existences, in which she had committed the sin of adultery. It was for this that she suffered so much in this life.

3. Lay Devotees

Sāmāvatī: She was born as the daughter of a banker (*seṭṭhi* or *shreṣhṭhin*) of the town Bhaddiya. Some time after her birth a famine broke out in the country; so her father with great difficulty took her and her mother to Kaushāmbī, where lived his old friend Ghoṣhaka Seṭṭhi. They found shelter in a cottage. At that time Ghoṣhaka Seṭṭhi opened a house of charity for giving food to the poor and needy. The Seṭṭhi of Bhaddiya felt ashamed to go to his friend in the miserable condition he was in, and sent his daughter Sāmāvatī to bring their food from the charity house. Sāmāvatī, being born in a respectable family, avoided the rush of the poor clamouring for food and stood on one side quietly and bashfully. Her demeanour drew the kindly attention of the officer in charge of the charity house. On the first day she took food for three persons, on the second day she asked for two persons, while on the third day she asked for only one. The Superintendent derided her saying that she had now realized the capacity of her stomach and was asking for food for one person and not for two or three. At this suspicion of the Superintendent she disclosed to him the sad death of her father and on the following day of her mother. On inquiry she divulged the particulars of her parents to the Superintendent, who thereupon adopted her as his daughter.

One day she suggested to the Superintendent the ways and means for bringing order into the chaotic conditions created at the time of the distribution of food. She said that an area should be enclosed by a fence, within which the food was to be kept. There should be two passages, one for incoming and the other for outgoing seekers of food. This suggestion of Sāmāvatī was readily accepted by the Superintendent, and the distribution of food became orderly and noiseless. This drew the attention of Ghoṣhaka Seṭṭhi, who thereupon came to know the particulars of Sāmāvatī. He had her brought to his house and gave her a daughter's place with due honour and suitable attendants.

One day King Udayana of Kaushāmbī met her while she was going to a river for bath, and was charmed by her extraordinary beauty. He asked for her hand in marriage, but Ghoṣhaka declined his offer. At this the king got angry, and turned him out of his house and sealed it with his royal seal. When Sāmāvatī came to know this plight of his foster-father, she advised him to agree to the king's proposal, provided he allowed her to take with her the five hundred girls who used to attend on her. The king accepted the proposal and made Sāmāvatī his queen.

Some time after this, King Udayana married another equally beautiful girl called Chūḷamāgandiya, whose parents once tried to get her married to Buddha, who turned down the proposal with a sharp rebuff. At this refusal she bore a bitter grudge against the compassionate Teacher.

In the course of his peregrinations Buddha once came to Kaushāmbī and was received with great honour by Ghoṣhaka Seṭṭhi, who offered his garden called Ghoṣhitārāma for his residence along with his disciples. Chūḷamāgandiya, who was then a queen of the place, wanted to avail herself of this opportunity to take revenge for the insult flung upon her by Buddha by spurning to accept her hand in marriage. She engaged two wicked ruffians to hurl abuses on the Teacher, but the latter remained untouched by such abuses, continued his sojourn at Kaushāmbī and delivered his discourses regularly.

An attendant of Queen Sāmāvatī, called Khujjuttarā, heard of the fame of Buddha in the house of the garland-maker from whom she used to purchase garlands for the queen every day. She listened to the discourses of Buddha and remembered them well. One day, on Sāmāvatī's insistence, she reproduced in her presence those discourses, which made a strong impression on her mind and roused her faith in Buddha, his *dharma* and *saṅgha*. She became anxious to have a look at the Teacher, but this she was unable to do, since King Udayana had no faith in Buddha. The queen therefore waited for a chance to see Buddha, when he would be passing by the palace, through the windows of her apartments. She used to wait at the window holes to catch a glimpse of the Teacher. This was noticed by the other queen Chūḷamāgandiya, who wanted to exploit this regard of Sāmāvatī for Buddha as an expedient for bringing her into disrepute in the eyes of the king. Failing to rouse the anger of the king by the information of Sāmāvatī's regard for Buddha, she took to many other artifices and at last was able to enrage the king so much that he took up a bow and poisoned arrows to shoot Sāmāvatī and her attendants. They, however, remained unperturbed at this attitude of the king, and exercised their *maitrī* (goodwill) feeling towards him in such a way that he could not even release the bow and arrows from his hands. He became dumbfounded at this discomfiture of his and did not know what to do. Then at Sāmāvatī's intercession, he got rid of the bow and arrows, and knelt down asking for her pardon, which, of course, was readily vouchsafed. Sāmāvatī then secured the permission of the king to offer gifts to Buddha and his disciples. She also wished that the king should invite a monk to the palace daily to deliver discourses, and this the king complied with by requesting Ānanda to do so. For her perfection in the practice of goodwill, she was complimented by Buddha as the foremost of the female lay devotees who perfected themselves in the exercise of goodwill to others.

Khujjuttarā: Khujjuttarā was chief of the vastly learned female lay devotees (*upāsikās*). She was born as the daughter of a nurse in the house of the banker Ghoṣhaka of Kaushāmbī. As she was hunchbacked at her very birth, she was named Khujjuttarā from *Kubjā* Uttarā the hunchbacked Uttarā. She became one of the attendants of Queen Sāmāvatī, who used to give her a little sum every day for purchasing garlands. The blessed Buddha once reached Kaushāmbī and stopped at the Ghoṣhitārāma built for and dedicated to him by Ghoṣhaka Seṭṭhi. One day the Teacher along with his disciples paid a visit to the house of the chief garland-maker. At that time Khujjuttarā went there for garlands and was told that all the garlands would be given to the Teacher and his disciples, and so there were none to spare for her queen. The garland-maker asked her to help him in sending food to the Teacher and his disciples, to which she gladly agreed. On listening to the discourse delivered by the Teacher after taking his food, she not only committed to memory every word of it but also attained the first stage of sanctification, *srota-āpatti*. She became truth-conscious and would not touch others' money. Henceforward she gave up the habit of stealing half of the little money given to her by Queen Sāmāvatī for purchasing garlands. As a consequence of this, she took a double quantity of garlands for the queen, who noticed this sudden change and inquired of her the reason for it. She then disclosed to the queen that she had been stealing half the amount given to her, and that the teachings of Buddha had brought about the change in her habits. Learning of the greatness of Buddha and realizing the excellence of his teaching, the queen pardoned Khujjuttarā, relieved her of her duties as a maidservant and entrusted her with the duty of listening to the discourses of Buddha and repeating them to her for enlightenment. Khujjuttarā could remember whatever she heard once, and so she agreed to comply with her wishes. At the time of repeating the discourses it was arranged that she would occupy a high seat like a teacher, and the queen was to sit on a low seat as a listener. Every day she would go to Buddha, listen to his discourses and repeat the same to the queen. The discourses so delivered became a collection, which has come down to us as the Pali text *Itivuttaka*. In due course she became vastly learned, and so she was complimented by the Teacher as the foremost of the vastly learned female lay devotees.

Vishākhā: She was born as a daughter of Sumanādevī and Dhanañjaya, son of Meṇḍaka, the fabulously rich banker of the city of Bhaddiya in the province of Aṅga. Meṇḍaka was very pious, and so was practically his whole family. In the dominion of King Bimbisāra there were five bankers of untold wealth, and Meṇḍaka was one of them. King Bimbisāra was requested by King Prasenajit of Kosala to persuade one of the five rich bankers of his kingdom to come over and settle down in Kosala. To oblige his royal friend he suggested to Meṇḍaka to send his son Dhanañjaya to Kosala. King Prasenajit selected Sāketa, a place about seven *yojanas* (about fifty-six miles) distant from Shrāvastī, as suitable for his residence.

Meṇḍaka was a great devotee of Buddha, and so when the latter once reached Bhaddiyanagara in the course of his peregrinations, he was warmly received by Meṇḍaka, who also asked his grand-daughter Vishākhā to pay her respects to the Teacher with her five hundred companions. Vishākhā felt very happy to do this and proceeded in a vehicle as far as it was proper and then went on foot to meet the Teacher. She listened to his discourse and became then and there a *srota-āpanna,* the first stage of sanctification in Buddhist doctrines.

At Shrāvastī there lived a banker called Migāra, who had a grown up son called Puṇṇavaddhana. He was looking for a bride for his son and deputed his men to find out a suitable girl. In the course of their search for such a girl they met Vishākhā and were struck by her beauty and demeanour. When the men were observing her features from a distance, it began to rain, and her friends ran hither and thither looking for a covered place. Vishākhā, however, without minding her clothes that were being drenched, walked slowly towards a shelter. Her quiet and steady movement roused the curiosity of the watchers, who wanted to know the reason of her slow gait and at the same time to find out what her voice was like ; so they entered into a conversation with her. They asked why she was not walking fast like her companions, though her clothes were getting wet. She replied that she had ample clothes in her house so she did not mind her clothes being drenched ; and she walked slowly because she did not like to take the risk of injuring any of her limbs, inasmuch as a grown-up unmarried girl with a broken limb was like a broken water-pot, to be thrown away. The men were very much impressed by her talk and threw the garland over her head as a sign of selection as a bride. She felt shy, since she knew that she was going to be married soon ; so she was screened off by her friends and attendants. The men followed her, met her father Dhanañjaya and proposed to him the marriage of his daughter with Puṇṇavaddhana, the son of Migāra. Dhanañjaya said that though the wealth of the bridegroom's father did not bear any comparison with his, he would accept the proposal, since they were of the same social status.

When the news of Dhanañjaya's acceptance of the proposal was communicated to Migāra, he was very happy that his daughter-in-law would be coming from a very rich family. He informed King Prasenajit of the proposal and sought his permission to go to Sāketa for performing the ceremony. The king expressed his willingness to grace the occasion by his presence and proceeded to Sāketa along with Migāra and his people. Dhanañjaya made lavish preparations to receive the king and his retinue as also Migāra, his relatives and friends, so much so that his guests were all taken aback. The king thought that it would be difficult for Dhanañjaya to act as their host in such a lavish manner for a long time, and so he inquired of him when he would be prepared to send his daughter to her father-in-law's place. Dhanañjaya replied that as the rainy season had already set in, he would entreat his guests to remain there for four months and receive the same hospitality. Three months passed amid great festivities, and in the fourth month it was found that some of the ornaments for the bride were not ready for want of suitable firewood on account of rain. Thereupon Dhanañjaya ordered his men to utilize the wood-work of the stables and cow-sheds, and if even these were insufficient, to burn the coarse cloth available in the house for the purpose of making fire. The four months at last elapsed, and the day arrived for the departure of the bride.

On the day previous to her departure, her father gave her instructions about avoiding gossip, being careful about lending, helping poor relatives, taking particular care of her parents-in-law and husband and giving alms to the recluses who might come to the house. Along with these instructions Dhanañjaya deputed eight relatives to watch the actions of his daughter and correct her if there should be any lapses in her conduct.

Vishākhā was adorned with creeper-like ornaments worth a huge sum. She was also given countless other articles as dowry. After giving a befitting farewell party to the king and his retinue and the bridegroom's family, Dhanañjaya sent her daughter to her father-in-law's house.

Vishākhā preferred to enter into the city of Shrāvastī in an open carriage, so that the people of the city might have a good look at her. The people of Shrāvastī were amazed at the beauty and grandeur of the bride, as also at the large amount of dowry given by her father. Vishākhā endeared herself to the people of Shrāvastī by distributing among them the presents given to her by her father.

In order to celebrate the occasion of his son's marriage, Migāra, the bridegroom's father, invited the monks belonging to the Nirgrantha faith, which was professed by him, to his house. He then sent for Vishākhā to pay them her respects. In response to his call, Vishākhā came quickly, but became disappointed to see the monks naked. She turned back in disgust. At this the monks became angry and reprimanded their host for bringing an inauspicious daughter-in-law, who had faith in Gautama Buddha, and advised him to turn her out of the house. Migāra regretted his inability to act according to their advice, and said that she came of a very rich family and could not be so easily asked to leave the house. He supplicated them to excuse her, since she was yet very young and not so wise.

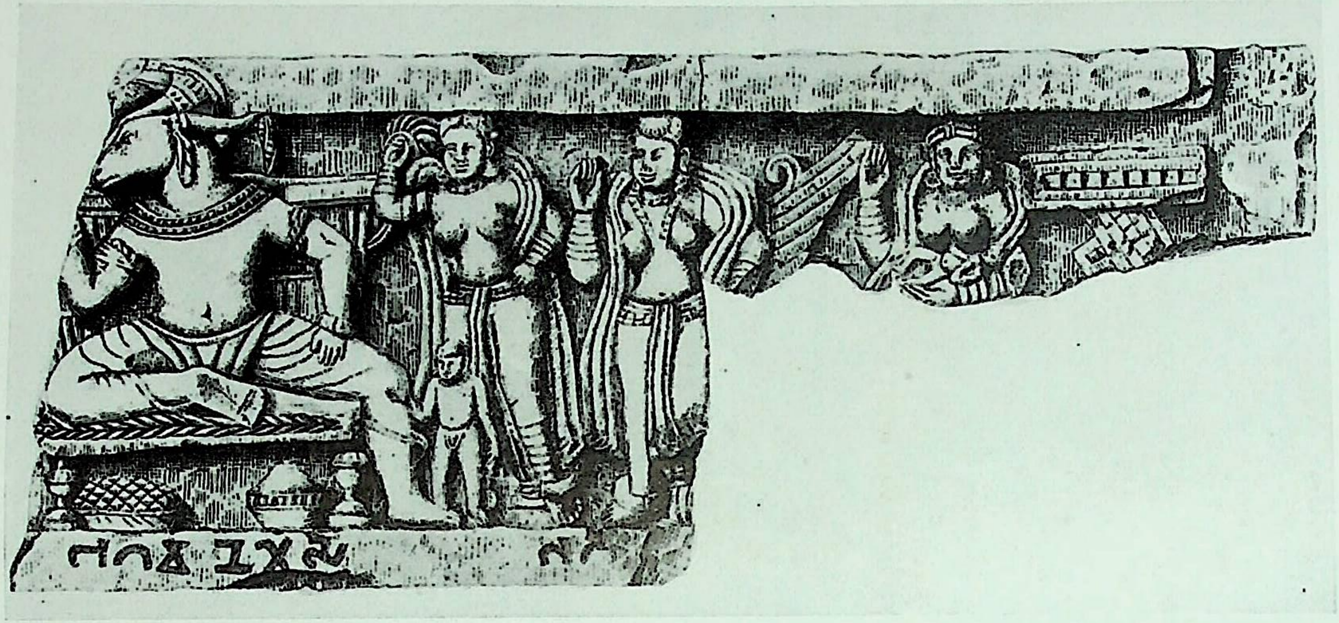
On the following day, when he was taking his food, a Buddhist monk came to the door of the house for alms. Migāra did not care to look at him and went on taking his food. At this Vishākhā requested the monk to move to the next house, saying that her father-in-law was then eating "stale" food. On hearing this Migāra got enraged, because he had been served with "stale" food by his daughter-in-law, and asked her to remove the food at once and at the same time to leave his house. Vishākhā protested strongly saying that she was not a water-carrying maid brought from a river bank, but was the daughter of good parents who were alive, so she could not be turned out of the house in that manner. Even if she committed any mistake, there were the eight relatives sent by her father for correcting her omissions and commissions. Migāra informed her relatives of the "stale" food served by Vishākhā. On inquiry she explained that by calling the food "stale" she meant that her father-in-law was enjoying his food as a result of his past meritorious acts, and he was not accumulating fresh merits by giving alms to monks.

One night Vishākhā went out of her apartment with her maid-servants carrying lamps to help the delivery of a mare. Unaware of this fact, her father-in-law charged her with the guilt of going out at night at her sweet will. He placed this along with some other complaints before the eight relatives, who then convinced him of the groundlessness of his apprehensions. He realized his mistakes and expressed regret for them. He also requested Vishākhā not to mind his misapprehensions. Vishākhā was very much pleased at the admission of mistakes by her father-in-law, and took this opportunity to obtain his permission to invite Buddha and his disciples to the house and offer them food whenever she wished. The permission was granted, though grudgingly. But Migāra gradually became a devotee of Buddha and gave up his former faith. In his illness, Vishākhā looked after him with great care, for which he became such an admirer of her that he looked upon her as his mother, and so Vishākhā came to be known as Migāra-*mātā*.

Vishākhā was a frequent visitor to the places where Buddha delivered his discourses. When visiting these places she preferred to go without any ornaments on her body. One day she offered all her ornaments to Buddha, but as gold could not be accepted by the monks, she sold them out and collected nine crores of *kārṣhāpaṇas*. With this wealth she built a magnificent monastery containing one thousand chambers. This monastery became famous in the history of Buddhism as *Migāra-mātā-pāsāda*.

After listening to the discourses every evening, she would go round the monastery to find out if the monks or nuns needed any article of use, and if anybody did, she would supply it quickly. By making gifts to the monks and nuns she was never satiated. At last she prayed to Buddha for some exclusive privileges for her whole life. These were: to supply rainy season robes to the monks of Shrāvastī; to offer food to all monks and nuns coming to or departing from Shrāvastī, as also to such of them as fell sick and to their attendants; to provide medicines for the sick monks and nuns; to keep rice-gruel always ready for the monks and nuns; and lastly to provide bathing robes for the nuns.

She vied with Anāthapiṇḍika in her gifts to the *saṅgha*. Her large house remained filled with yellow-robed monks and nuns in the morning, and in the afternoon she provided them with all medicinal requisites. For these endless gifts of hers she was complimented by Buddha as the foremost of women donors.



NAIGAMESHO NEMESO

Courtesy : Department of Archaeology, Government of India

CHAPTER XIII

GREAT WOMEN IN JAINISM

1. Mothers and Daughters

It is difficult to exhaust the list of leading women recorded in the literature of the two principal Jaina sects—the Shwetāmbara and the Digambara. Nor is it possible to give detailed accounts of even a few. Again, some of these may not have been real historical persons and seem to be mere legendary figures; it is not possible here to enter into any critical historical discussion about them. But to pious Jaina women, these characters have supplied certain ideals, and as such they have lived through the ages in the forms of hundreds and thousands of Jaina lay women (Shrāvikas) who followed those ideals, but whose names are not recorded in literature or epigraphs.

Women were highly regarded in Jaina society, and it was prescribed that in emergencies such as floods, fire and robbery, a woman must be rescued first.[1] From very early times, the Jainas paid the highest possible veneration to the parents of the twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras, especially to their mothers, so much so that stone plaques (*paṭṭas*) showing the twenty-four mothers sitting with the infant Jinas on their laps were daily worshipped in many a Jaina shrine. They are still worshipped in the Jaina temples at Ābu, Girnār, Pāṭaṇ, Oshiā and other places,[2] and even in Jaina rituals of both the sects (such as the consecration ceremony of a Jina image), the mothers of the Tīrthaṅkaras receive due worship.[3]

Mahāvīra, the last Tīrthaṅkara (of this age), who lived in the sixth century B.C., was born of the Kṣhatriya princess Trishalā, also known as Priyakāriṇī. Later legends say that he was first conceived in the womb of a brahmin lady, Devānandā, but Indra arranged to transfer the embryo to the Kṣhatriya lady Trishalā, which only shows the antagonism of heterodox Jainism to the ritualistic Brāhmaṇical faith. It is indeed possible that Devānandā was the actual mother, married to a Kṣhatriya prince, Siddhārtha, and that she was also known as Trishalā, or Priyakāriṇī. It is only a probable explanation of the legend of the transfer of Mahāvīra's embryo. For in the *Bhagavatī-sūtra,* a Jaina canonical text of the Shwetāmbaras,[4] this brahmin lady Devānandā is reported to have once visited one of Mahāvīra's congregations after the latter's attainment of *kevala-jñāna* (omniscience), when milk began to ooze out of her breasts at the sight of the Jina. Being questioned by his disciple, Mahāvīra explained that the lady was his mother. Devānandā expressed her desire to renounce the world and, with the consent of the Jina, entered into the order of Jaina nuns.

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[1] *Bṛihat-kalpa-bhāṣhya* (Ed. Muni Puṇyavijaya, Bhavanagar 1933-8), Vol. IV. 4348 f.

[2] U. P. Shah, Varddhamāna-vidyā-paṭa, *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. 9 (1941), p. 48 and pl. 4, figs. 3-4.

[3] Cf. *Vidhiprapā* of Jinaprabha-sūri (Ed. by Jinavijayaji, Surat, 1941), p. 105; *Pratiṣhṭhā-sāroddhāra* of Āshādhara, Ch. 3, p. 56.

The Jainas at Mathurā seem to have accorded special reverence and worship to the mother of Mahāvīra, and the figure of Āryāvatī (*Pkt.* Āyavatī), on a Tablet of Homage (*ayāgapaṭa*), assignable to the first century B.C., seems to represent the great lady who gave birth to such an eminent philosopher and monk Mahāvīra.[5]

Of the earlier mothers, Marudevī, the mother of the first Tīrthaṅkara Ṛishabhanātha, is especially known amongst the Jainas. When the news came to Marudevī and Bharata (the son of Ṛishabha, ruling at Vinītā) that Ṛishabha had obtained *kevala-jñāna* in the city of Purimatāla, Marudevī, mounted on an elephant and followed by King Bharata with his royal retinue, went out to meet and worship the Lord sitting in a *samavasaraṇa,* a divine assembly hall constructed by the gods. Seeing the spiritual lustre and splendour of the Tīrthaṅkara, Marudevī was absorbed in meditation and immediately obtained herself the *kevala-jñāna* and died. She was the second person to obtain *mokṣha* (liberation) in this decadent age on earth.[6]

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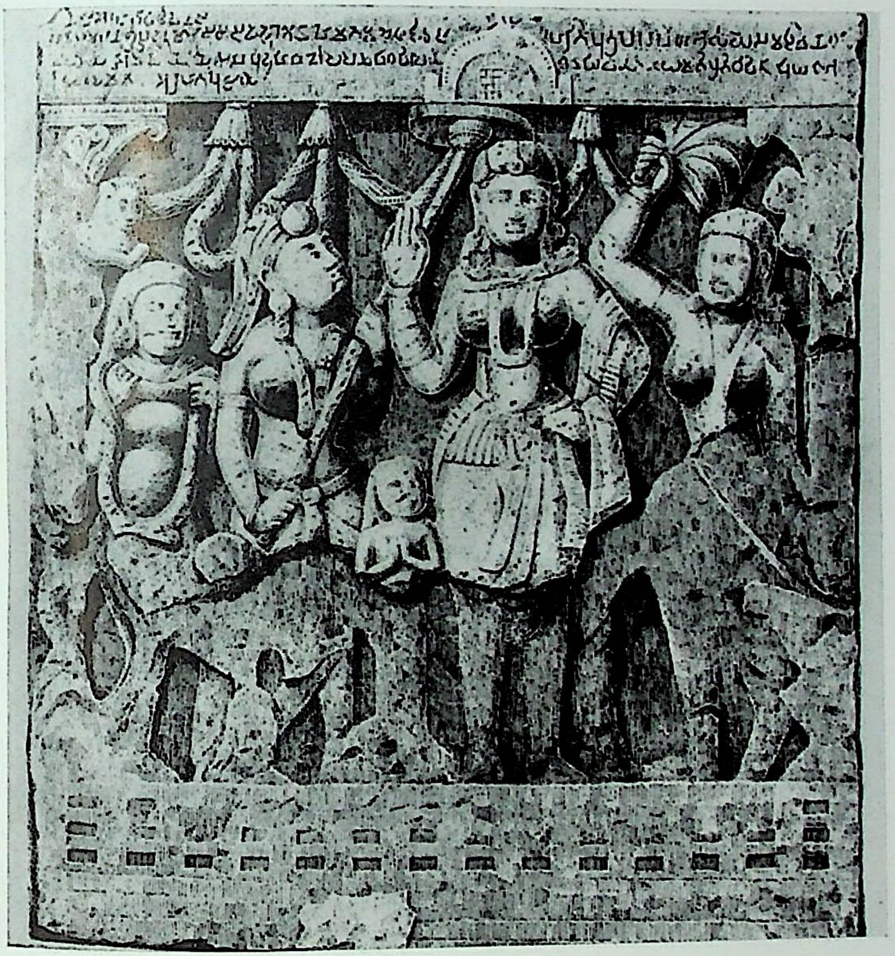
[4] It is the Shwetāmbaras who narrate the transfer legend. The Digambaras merely refer to her as Priyakāriṇī. The evidence of the *Bhagavatī-sūtra,* 9. 6, cited above, is, however, noteworthy.

[5] For a representation of the Āryāvatī Tablet, see Vincent Smith, *Jaina Stūpa and other Antiquities at Mathurā.* For *paṭas* of the Jaina mothers, see U. P. Shah, *loc. cit.* p. 48 f. and plates. One of the *tapas* or penances prescribed for the Jainas was in honour of holy mothers and was known as *Mātṛi-tapa* (see *Vidhiprapā,* p. 27).

[6] Sculptures of Marudevī on an elephant, going to meet the Lord, are sometimes found in the front halls of shrines of Ṛishabhadeva, e.g. at Shatruñjaya. For an account of Marudevī, see *Trishashṭi-shalākā-purusha-charitra,* I (G. O. Series, Vol. 51, pp. 194 ff.).



ĀRYĀVATĪ

Courtesy: Department of Archaeology, Government of India

Brāhmī and Sundarī were the two daughters of Ṛiṣhabhanātha. Ṛiṣhabha taught the knowledge of eighteen alphabets to Brāhmī and arithmetic to Sundarī. The ancient script of India, the *Brāhmī-lipī* is said to have derived its name from this daughter of Ṛiṣhabha, who first received the knowledge of scripts. Now Bāhubalī, a valiant son of Ṛiṣhabha, ruling at Podanapura or Taxila, did not acknowledge the suzerainty of his elder brother Chakravartin Bharata. The two ultimately entered into a duel, but when victory came to Bāhubalī, the latter thought of the evanescence of life and worldly pleasures and, renouncing his kingdom, became a monk. In spite of austere practices and deep meditation, he could not obtain final knowledge and emancipation, since his subtle egoism had remained undestroyed. Brāhmī and Sundarī approached him and cleverly asked him to descend from the back of the elephant thereby suggesting that he should discard or uproot his egoism. This done, Bāhubalī immediately obtained omniscience.[7]

Mallinātha, the nineteenth Tīrthaṅkara, was a princess according to the Shwetāmbara Jaina canons.[8] She was the daughter of Kumbha, the ruler of Mithilā (modern Bihār), and was exceedingly beautiful and learned. The fame of her personal charms travelled far and wide and attracted kings of Kosala, Aṅga, Kāshī, Kuṇāla, Kuru and Pañchāla countries. They all sought her hand in marriage, but Kumbha refused them. Enraged at this, they attacked Mithilā and a fierce battle took place. When the battle was in progress and Kumbha was on the verge of defeat, Malli requested her father to invite all the kings to her apartment and expressed her desire to meet them. When they entered her private hall, they were taken aback by the charming figure of Malli, as they thought, standing there, but their illusion was soon removed when the real Malli, more beautiful in appearance, entered the room by another door and told them that what they had first seen was her lifelike golden statue. At the same time, she opened a lid on the statue's head, concealed under a lotus device, and puffs of extremely foul smell issued. The statue was hollow and had been filled with the finest eatables some days ago, which had rotten by then. Giving the analogy of the golden statue, Malli told them that beneath the external charm of her own feminine body lay an equally foul mass of filthy matter of a transitory nature. She further told them that she wanted to renounce worldly pleasures and turn an ascetic. The kings, too, filled with remorse, realized that the way to genuine happiness lay in meditation and the practice of an ascetic life and, leaving their kingdoms to the care of their successors, followed Malli in adopting the ascetic order.

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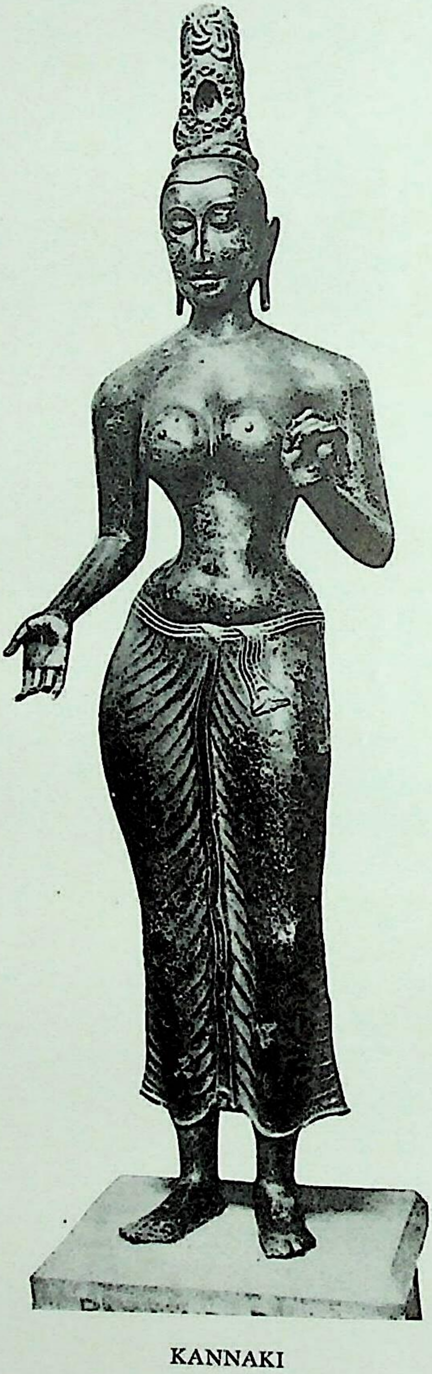
[7] *Ibid.* pp. 272-326. According to the Digambaras, his capital was at Podanapura, while the Shwetāmbaras place it in Taxila. The Digambara sect does not refer to this mission of Brāhmī and Sundarī in such early works as the *Mahā Purāṇa* of Jinasena. But in the reliefs at Ellora and other sites Brāhmī and Sundarī are always represented on the two sides of Bāhubalī performing such rigorous austerities. Also, *Bhāṣhya-gāthās* 32-7 on *Āvashyaka Niryukti*, verse 349, in *Āvashyaka-vṛitti* of Haribhadra, p. 153.

[8] An interesting account of her life is given in the *Nāyadhammakahāo*, Ch. 8. The Digambaras do not believe that women can obtain emancipation, and hence Malli, in the Digambara traditions, is a prince, rather than a princess.

2. Types of Chastity

Rājīmatī: Chastity amongst women and faithfulness on the part of a wife towards her husband, even when the marriage rite has not taken place and she is only a *vāg-dattā* (betrothed), is the highest ideal of Indian womanhood, and Jainism (which had a rigorous ethical code and laid stress on the practice of austerities and penance) made no exceptions. An ideal woman of this type was Rājīmatī, the wife of the twenty-second Tīrthaṅkara, Neminātha, a cousin of Kṛishṇa. When his marriage procession was on its way towards the marriage pavilion, Neminātha, the bridegroom, saw a number of animals encaged in a pen situated on the way. Upon inquiry he learnt that they were to be killed for serving the groom's party with meat. Alarmed at the thought of the impending large-scale animal slaughter on his account, Neminātha immediately turned his mind away from this world, which involved such sins of killing, and entered the life of a monk. Rājīmatī followed the footsteps of her husband and joined the ascetic order. Once while Neminātha, his brother Rathanemi and Rājīmatī were practising penance on the same mountain (Girnār), Rathanemi lost self-control and was attracted towards his sister-in-law. But Rājīmatī boldly resisted and baffled his attempts by telling him that he was preparing to drink from the vomit of another (*Dashavaikālika-sūtra,* 2. 7-11).

The theme of Rathanemi and Rājīmatī also forms the subject of a very old and beautiful ballad in the Jaina canonical text



KANNAKI
Courtesy : O. C. Gangoly

Uttarādhyayana-sūtra (22), which shows that from very early times she was held as an ideal of chastity.

Kannaki: The most celebrated example of female chastity in the south is provided by the story of Kannaki in the well known Tamil classic *Shilappadikāram* (composed in *c.* second century A.D.).[9] As the goddess of chastity, she is worshipped even today amongst the Tamils and is also adored as Paṭṭinī Devī in Ceylon. The highly dramatic narrative in the *Shilappadikāram* moves human hearts profoundly even now. Kovalan forgets his sweet and chaste wife Kannaki, being infatuated by the beauty of a courtesan Mādhavī, and consequently ruins his own fortune and that of his wife. Filled with remorse and with better sense regained, the penitent husband with his forgiving wife leaves Puhār for Madurā, where the unfortunate Kovalan is mistaken for the real thief of the precious anklet of the Pāṇḍyan queen, and this tragic error leads to the execution of Kovalan at the orders of the Pāṇḍyan king of Madurā. Under the stress of this final overwhelming sorrow, Kannaki, "the angelic and uncomplaining wife excels herself and towers above the king and queen and petty humanity." Her anguish at the sight of her dead husband is unbearable, and she twists and plucks out her left breast, in the extremity of pain, with her own hand and hurls it across the streets. As a result of this, the accursed city of Madurā soon becomes a heap of charred ruins. The lovers, however, are reunited in heaven, and Kannaki is immortalized and worshipped throughout the ages as a goddess of female chastity.

3. NUNS AND LAY DEVOTEES

Of the contemporaries of Mahāvīra, Ajja (Āryā) Chandanā, became the first female disciple of Mahāvīra, and the head of his Jaina order of nuns.[10] Jayantī, the sister of King Shatānīka of Kaushāmbī, who used to attend the discourses of Mahāvīra and discuss with him theological and metaphysical problems, ultimately discarded her royal comforts and became a devout nun.[11] Mṛigāvatī, a very beautiful queen of this king, is a well known example of female chastity, political sagacity and heroism. Pradyota, the king of Ujjayinī, attacked Kaushāmbī in order to take away this most charming princess of his age. Shatānīka fell ill and died when the battle was in progress, but Mṛigāvatī, showing admirable political sagacity and foresight, declared that the king was sick, valiantly led her army, drove Pradyota back beyond the frontiers and then gave out the news that the king was dead. But her subjects were tired and were no match for the overwhelming strength of Pradyota's army. Mṛigāvatī changed her tactics and offered to go with Pradyota into his harem if the latter built a strong fortress around Kaushāmbī and installed her young son Udayana on his legitimate throne as an independent ruler. This done, she went to the assembly of Mahāvīra, where Pradyota also was sitting, and expressed her desire to become a Jaina nun with the consent of Pradyota. Pradyota, too, under the pious influence of the Master, turned his mind to better thoughts and, full of remorse, gave the necessary consent not only to Mṛigāvatī but to some of his own queens also to be initiated into the order of Jaina nuns at the hands of Mahāvīra.[12]

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[9] *Shilappadikāram*, translated into English by V. R. R. Dīkṣhitār, Oxford University Press (1939).

[10] *Āvashyaka Chūrṇi*, II, pp. 205 ff, 318 ff; *Āvashyaka Niryukti*, p. 520 f.; *Āvashyaka-ṭīkā*, p. 294 f. When King Sayāṇīya of Kaushāmbī invaded Champā, Vasumatī, the daughter of Dadhivāhana fell into the hands of an enemy officer, was captured and brought to Kaushāmbī, where she was sold as a slave-girl to a merchant, whose wife, becoming jealous of her, tortured her and put her into custody. Vasumatī once offered food to Mahāvīra and joined his order as the nun Chandanā.

Jaina literature has recorded the names and accounts of several Jaina nuns and lay women who have contributed to the progress of knowledge and the Jaina faith. They were known for their learning and intelligence. The seven sisters of Sthūlabhadra (about 150 years after Mahāvīra's nirvana), Yakṣhā and others, were known for their feats of memory ; all of them became Jaina nuns. Ārya Vajra, who flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era, was given over to a Jaina saint when he was but a boy six years old, and was left to the care of some Jaina nuns who taught him scriptures, etc. and trained him in such a way that the boy ultimately turned out a great Jaina *āchārya* (teacher). But more than any other nun, the contribution of Yākinī Mahattarā deserves special notice. Haribhadra-sūri was a brahmin scholar, well versed in the *shāstras* (scriptures), who declared that he would accept as guru the person who defeated him in argument, and whose speech he could not explain or understand. It was a leader (*Mahattarā*) of Jaina nuns, Yākinī by name, who defeated him and converted him to the Jaina faith.[13] The greatness of Yākinī can be understood if only one realizes the contribution of the versatile scholiast Haribhadra-sūri to Indian literature and the reform initiated by him in the Jaina sect. Haribhadra wrote on ethics, yoga, logic and rituals, as also wrote commentaries on older texts, composed story works and reformed the Jaina church by vehemently opposing the monks who adopted *chaitya-vāsa* (residence in shrines) or kept money, etc. It was not an easy task to defeat such a dialectician in argument and convert him to such an extent that he should take special pride in calling himself Yākinī-Mahattarā-sūnu (son of the great Jaina nun Yākinī)! She must have been a genius and must have contributed a good deal to the training of Haribhadra-sūri (died *c.* 720 A.D.).

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[11] *Bhagavatī-sūtra*, 12. 2. It was Jayantī who took Mṛigāvatī to the assembly of Mahāvīra. The *Bhagavatī-sūtra* has recorded only one incident of the dialogue between Jayantī and Mahāvīra, but it is clear that women took active part in such theological or metaphysical discussions, and that Jayantī was one of the learned women of the age amongst the followers of Mahāvīra. Chandanā, mentioned above, who was formerly a princess of Champā, must have been a woman of great learning and culture, since she rose to be the head of Mahāvīra's order of nuns.

[12] *Āvashyaka Chūrṇi*, pp. 88 ff.

It was not uncommon to find nuns of high calibre and great learning among the Jainas. Guṇā Sādhwī, for instance, who prepared the first copy of that monumental allegorical work of Siddharṣhi, the *Upamitabhava-prapañcha-kathā*, in A.D. 905, is addressed by Siddharṣhi himself as the goddess of learning incarnate! In A.D. 1118, in the age of Siddharāja Jayasiṁha, two nuns, Mahānandāshrī Mahattarā and Gaṇinī Vīramatī, actively helped Maladhāri Hemachandra in the composition of a lengthy commentary on the *Visheṣhāvashyaka-bhāṣhya* of Jinabhadra. In 1350 A.D., Guṇasaṁṛiddhi Mahattarā composed a Prakrit work entitled the *Añjanā-sundarī-charitra*.

A woman especially aspires to achieve two things—unblemished love towards her husband and success as a mother of good children. The affection that a mother bears towards her son is best pictured in the story of King Solomon's justice. It is not an easy task for a mother to sacrifice her own son for an ideal, or willingly to allow him to turn away from home and become an ascetic. Meghakumāra, the son of Dhāriṇī and King Shreṇika, desired to become a Jaina ascetic, and when in spite of great persuasion he refused to change his resolve, the parents took him to Mahāvīra, and the mother instructed her son to be true to the ideal of a monk and blessed him in his new walk of life. Greater still was the sacrifice of Pāhiṇī, but for whose voluntary sacrifice India would have missed the great scholiast and versatile writer Hemachandrāchārya, and the Jaina sect a great *āchārya* and propagator of the faith.

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[13] Haribhadra-sūri-Prabandha in *Prabandha-kosha* of Rājashekhara (Singhi Jaina Series); Life of Haribhadra-sūri in the *Prabhāvaka-charitra* of Prabhāchandra (Nirṇaya Sāgara Press; also Singhi Jaina Series). An earlier account is available in the unpublished *Kahāvali* of Bhadreshwara-sūri.

In the town of Dhandhukā, north Gujarāt, there lived a wealthy Jaina merchant, Chāchiga, whose wife Pāhiṇī was especially pious and devoted to the practice of the Jaina religion. To them was born a son, Chāṅgadeva (or Chaṅgadeva) in 1088 A.D. It is said that before the birth of the child, Pāhiṇī once dreamt that she had given a wish-giving gem (*chintāmaṇi-ratna*) to her guru, Āchārya Devachandra. This she narrated to him. When the boy was five years old, Pāhiṇī once went with him to Devachandra for paying her respects to the saint. The boy straightway occupied the seat of Devachandra himself, whereupon the monk could foresee what was to happen, and reminding Pāhiṇī of her dream, asked her to make a gift of her dear and only son Chāṅgadeva to the Jaina church. Her husband was away, but after some hesitation she rose to the occasion and made the precious gift, fearing that if she awaited the arrival of her husband, he might not consent to it out of paternal attachment. It was a great ordeal for her, for in addition to her inner conflict, she had to tackle her husband, who became wild with rage and tried several means to regain the child, whom Devachandra had wisely removed to Cambay. Ultimately, Chāchiga also seems to have been persuaded to give his consent to the initiation of Chāṅgadeva, who later became famous as Kali-kāla-sarvajña (omniscient in the Iron Age) Āchārya Hemachandra.[14]

Of a slightly different nature was the sacrifice of Shrīdevī, the wife of Vimala, minister to Bhīmadeva I of Pāṭaṇ. Like Pāhiṇī, the greatness of Shrīdevī can only be understood if one realizes that every woman aspires to attain the culmination of her married life in being a mother. To forego the fulfilment of this birthright for a cause, is one of the greatest sacrifices that a woman can make, and Shrīdevī was an eminent lady of this type.

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[14] Bühler: *Life of Hemachandra,* translated from German by Dr. Manilal Patel (Singhi Jaina Series, Bombay).

Vimala, a great statesman and warrior, was the descendant of a family well known for its riches and for the successive ministers it gave to the Chāḷukyan rulers of Aṇahillavāḍa Pāṭaṇ. He was once appointed governor of the Chandrāvatī region, which included in it Mt. Ābu. The lovely city of Chandrāvatī largely appealed to him and his learned wife Shrīdevī, both of whom were pious, generous and great patrons of art and culture. Here Vimala met a Jaina monk under whose influence he decided to undertake some religious act for the atonement of his sins as a warrior and statesman. The sage advised him to build Jaina temples at Ābu.

Vimala and Shrīdevī had no issue and felt lonely. Hence he invoked the goddess Ambikā to obtain two boons from her—one, a male issue and another, help in the construction of a shrine at Ābu which would be the finest work of art. The goddess, pleased with his devotion, appeared in person before him, but said that his merit (*puṇya*) was not so great as to make him worthy of two boons; so he should select the one that he liked. Vimala decided to give his reply the next day after consulting his wife. Shrīdevī justly thought that the issue may not be worthy of the father, while the temple would be more lasting and would bring happiness in the life hereafter. Vimala thereupon chose to erect the temple on Mt. Ābu, which to this day remains one of the most magnificent examples of fine marble carving. The legend is mixed up with supernatural elements and thereby loses much of its historical value. But it brings out the character of Shrīdevī, who was a great woman and contributed not a little to the greatness of Vimala.

Such acts of building shrines, tanks, step-wells, etc. or getting valuable manuscripts copied, done by pious Jaina women, make a very long list even from known epigraphs and colophons to several works, and speak highly of their cultural activities throughout the course of Indian history. Notable amongst these was Anupamādevī. The accounts of Shrīdevī and Anupamā show the high status and regard accorded to all deserving women by the society of their times.

In the south, Karnāṭaka saw a number of ladies who promoted the cause of the Jaina faith, built temples, etc. and performed the vow of *sallekhana* (death by fasting), which is considered an act of the highest merit. During the reign of the Rāshṭrakūṭa king Kṛishṇa II, a lady, Jakkiyabbe by name, was appointed Nāḷgāvuṇḍa (district officer) of Nāgarkhaṇḍa 70, in her deceased husband's place (*c.* 911 A.D.). Skilled in the art of good government, and faithful to the Jaina tenets, this fair and brave lady protected Nāgarkhaṇḍa 70, and ultimately thinking that worldly pleasures were insipid, died by *sallekhana.*[15]

Attimabbe, the wife of Mallappa, who was the commander of the Western Chāḷukya ruler Tailapa (A.D. 973-97), was an ideal devotee who had a thousand copies of Ponna's *Shānti Purāṇa* made at her own expense, besides one thousand five hundred images of gold and jewels.[16]

Lakkale, the wife of the celebrated Jaina general Gaṅga Rāja, is described in a record as "the lady of policy in business" and "the lady of victory in battle" to her husband Gaṅga Rāja. She erected a new Jaina shrine at Shravaṇa Beḷgoḷa in *c.* 1118 A.D.[17] and was a "mine of auspiciousness," so called on account of her numerous gifts of food, shelter, medicine and learning. The saintly figure of Shāntaḷādevī, the queen of the Hoysaḷa king Vishṇuvardhanadeva (*c.* 1123 A.D.), is eulogized in epigraphic records as an expert in singing, instrumental music and dancing, and was also renowned for her beauty. She also delighted in making gifts of the above kind and in the erection of Jaina shrines, which earned for her the titles, "crest jewel of perfect faith" and a "rampart of the Jaina faiths."[18]

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[15] *Epigraphica Carnatica,* Vol. 7, pp. 130-1.

[16] Rice, *Karṇāṭaka Shabdānushāsana,* Intro., pp. 28 ff., *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1883, pp. 301 ff.

[17] *Epigraphica Carnatica,* Vol. 2, pp. 57-8.

[18] *Epigraphica Carnatica,* Vol. 2, pp. 60, 75; Saletore, *Mediaeval Jainism,* pp. 165 ff.

CHAPTER XIV

GREAT WOMEN IN NORTH INDIA

(*c.* 400 B.C. TO 1200 A.D.)

IN THE following pages it is intended to discuss the activities of north Indian women who became famous in the fields of politics and administration, especially those who ruled over wide regions, as also those who became celebrated for their literary talents and scholarship. Unfortunately, even within these limits it is hardly possible to give a complete picture of the achievements of ancient Indian women in the present state of our knowledge, on account of the scanty data at our disposal.

1. WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS

(I) STRĪ-RĀJYA

Strī-rājya or the women's kingdom is often mentioned in Indian literature. The *Jaimini Bhārata* (Ch. 22), for instance, speaks of Pramīlā, queen of the land of the Amazons, who fought with the Pāṇḍava hero Arjuna. Although Pramīlā is no doubt a mythical figure, the existence of *strī-rājyas* in ancient India is not a mere flight of fancy, since it seems to be supported by works such as the *Si-yu-ki* of the seventh-century Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang. According to this work, to the north of the Brahmapura country in the present Kumāon-Garhwāl region in the Himālayas, "was the Suvarṇagotra country. . . . This was 'the Eastern Woman's Country,' so called because it was ruled by a succession of women. The husband of the queen was king; but he did not administer the government. The men attended only to the suppression of revolts and cultivation of the fields." The statement of the Chinese pilgrim seems to be supported by Atkinson's *Himalayan Districts*, according to which the Nu-wang tribe of Tibet was ruled by a woman who was called Pinchin. Hiuen Tsang also mentions another *strī-rājya*, called by him 'the Western Woman's Country,' near Laṅkara in the present Baluchisthan region. The same country seems to be located in Varāhamihira's *Bṛihat Saṁhitā* in the north-western part of Bhāratavarṣha. Unfortunately, nothing precise is known about the administrative and political activities of the women of the two *strī-rājyas* of ancient Bhāratavarṣha, although it is fairly certain that at least some of them exercised considerable power in the above fields of activity.

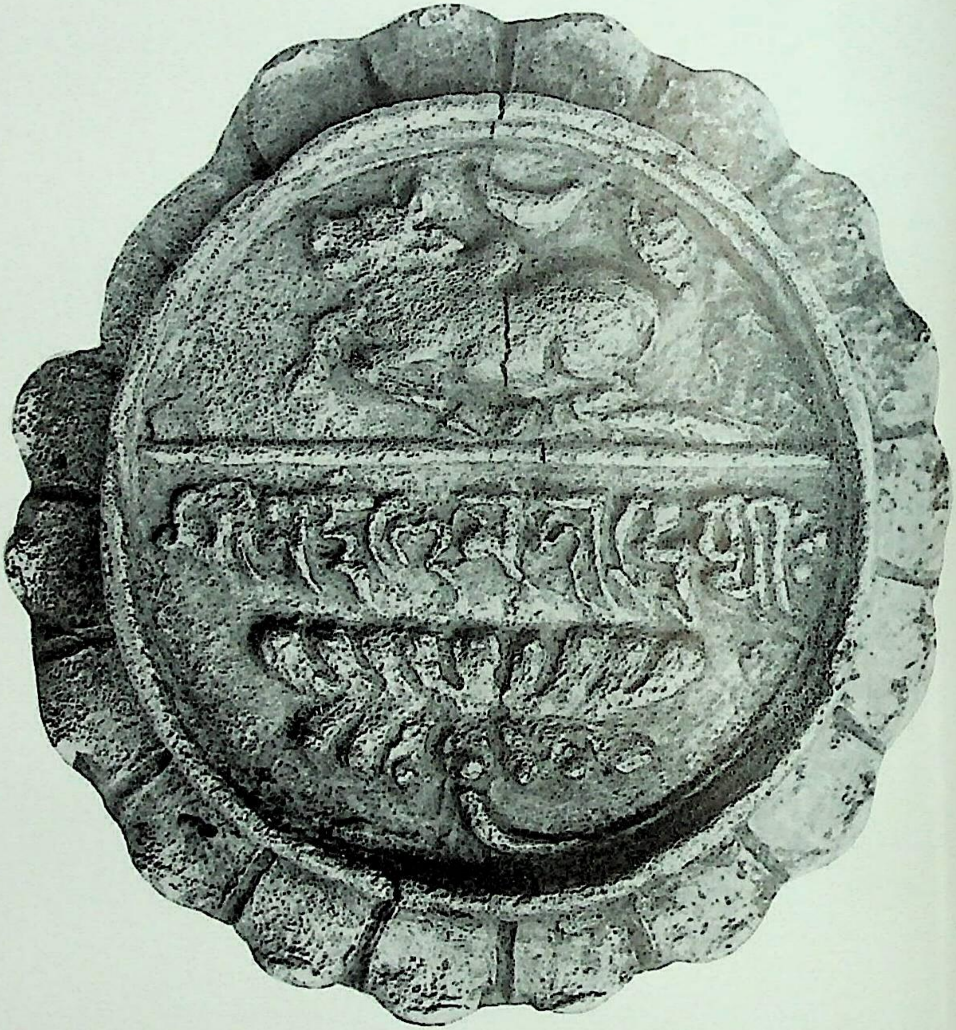
(II) THE VĀKĀṬAKA QUEEN PRABHĀVATĪ GUPTĀ

Prabhāvatī Guptā was the daughter of the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya (A.D. 376-414) of north India and the *agra-mahishī* or chief queen of King Rudrasena II of the Vākāṭaka dynasty ruling over wide regions of the Deccan.

Rudrasena II seems to have died before the close of the fourth century A.D. He probably left three sons, viz. Divākarasena, Dāmodarasena and Pravarasena. Divākarasena remained the Yuvarāja or Crown prince while his mother ruled the country at least for about thirteen years. It is usually believed that the sons of Rudrasena II were minors at the time of their father's death, and that Prabhāvatī Guptā ruled the kingdom as regent on behalf of the minor Yuvarāja Divākarasena. This may or may not be the case.

There is as yet no evidence to show that Divākarasena ever ascended his paternal throne as Mahārāja. In a later inscription dated the nineteenth regnal year of her son Pravarasena II, she is called "mother of the Mahārājas Dāmodarasena and Pravarasena," and is said to have been more than one hundred years old. Prabhāvatī's death does not appear to have taken place long before 455 A.D., which is the date of the death of her brother Emperor Kumāragupta I.

A charter of Prabhāvatī Guptā was issued from the feet of the god Rāmagiriswāmin, identified with the deity at Rāmṭek near Nāgpur, probably on the occasion of her visit to the holy temple on pilgrimage. In it she is described as a devotee of the Lord (i.e. Vishṇu) and is credited with the *gotra* or lineage (viz. *dhāraṇa*) and the family designation (i.e. Gupta) of her father. Her husband is known to have belonged to the Vishṇuvṛiddha *gotra*. Thus Prabhāvatī's marriage did not apparently involve the usual change of *gotra*. There is evidence to show that this was not essential in a popular



SEAL OF DAṆḌI-MAHĀDEVĪ

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Courtesy: D. C Sircar

form of ancient Indian marriage, possibly owing to the want of *sampradāna* (ceremonial offering).

(III) RULING QUEENS OF THE BHAUMA-KARA DYNASTY OF ORISSA

In ancient India, wives or daughters of kings did not usually succeed to the throne. In the Bhauma-Kara dynasty of ancient Orissa, however, although adoption does not appear to have been entirely unknown in it, it is really strange that no less than six queens adorned the throne on different occasions. The Bhauma-Karas ruled over lower Orissa between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

(a) *Queen Tribhuvana-mahādevī I*: She was the queen of King Lalitahāra and the daughter of Rājamalla, a southern Nāga chief. She is also called Siddhagaurī. According to an inscription, after the death of King Shubhākara III, his mother Tribhuvana-mahādevī ruled the kingdom for some years during the minority of her grandson. She seems to have assumed the name of Goswāminī after the illustrious queen of ancient Orissa bearing that name. She was a devout worshipper of Vishṇu, although the Bhauma-Karas were originally Buddhists.

(b) *Queen Tribhuvana-mahādevī II*: She was the wife of King Shubhākara IV, the elder brother of King Shivakara III, and ascended the throne after the latter. Her real name was Pṛithwī-mahādevī. She claims to have been the daughter of King Swabhāvatuṅga of Kosala, and although she was a staunch Vaishṇava, she was liberal enough to make certain grants in favour of a Shaiva religious establishment.

(c) *Queens Gaurī-mahādevī and Daṇḍi-mahādevī*: After the death of King Shubhākara V, the Bhauma-Kara throne was occupied by no less than four queens successively. It is really difficult to understand why none of them adopted a son. The first of these four ruling queens was Gaurī-mahādevī, wife of Shubhākara V, the last known male member of the Bhauma-Kara family. No record of the time of Gaurī-mahādevī has as yet been discovered. She was succeeded by her daughter Daṇḍi-mahādevī, who was a devout worshipper of the god Shiva, and ruled at least for about eight years. Her records bear dates in the years 180 and 187 of the Bhauma-Kara era, probably corresponding respectively to 1011 and 1018 A.D. Very little is known of the reign of both the queens.

(d) *Queens Bakula-mahādevī and Dharma-mahādevī*: Daṇḍi-mahādevī was succeeded by her step-mother Bakula-mahādevī, who was born in the Bhañja family. No facts of her reign are known.

She was succeeded by Dharma-mahādevī, the wife of her husband's elder brother, Shāntikara III. She is the last known ruler of the Bhauma-Kara family.

(IV) QUEEN DIDDĀ AND SOME HEROIC LADIES OF KĀSHMĪR

In the history of Kāshmīr, the period between 958 and 1003 A.D. was dominated by the personality of Queen Diddā. Here is the only instance in the history of ancient India where we have some details of the activities of a female ruler. Diddā was the daughter of Siṁharāja, king of Lohara, and the grand-daughter of the Shāhī king Bhīma or Bhīmapāla of Udabhāṇḍapura. She was married to the Kāshmīrian king Kṣhemagupta (950-8 A.D.). According to Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī,* a chronicle of Kāshmīr composed about the middle of the twelfth century A.D., Diddā had so great an influence on her husband that the latter "became known by the humiliating appellation of Diddā-Kṣhema." Kalhaṇa's statement is supported by the copper coins of Kṣhemagupta, which bear the legend 'Di-Kṣhema,' apparently a contraction of the above name.

After the death of Kṣhemagupta in 958 A.D., his son Abhimanyu was raised to the throne under the guardianship of the widowed queen mother. During Abhimanyu's rule, Diddā caused the downfall of the powerful chief minister Phalguna, who had incurred her displeasure by giving his daughter to Kṣhemagupta. The queen next found the powerful nobles Mahiman and Pāṭala conspiring for the throne of Kāshmīr. In spite of the great influence they wielded, Diddā turned them out of the royal palace, and when they rose in revolt, she quickly bought off their Brāhmaṇa supporters. One of the bribed Brāhmaṇas, named Yashodhara, was now made commander-in-chief of the Kāshmīrian forces. But when Yashodhara displayed energy in defeating the Shāhī king Thakkana, Diddā grew suspicious of his power and accused him of taking money for keeping the Shāhī on his throne. When an attempt was made to banish Yashodhara on this charge, his supporters raised a rebellion and succeeded in besieging Diddā in her palace. But she crushed the rebellion with the help of the minister Naravāhana and the valiant force known in Kāshmīr history as the Ekāṅgas. Kalhaṇa is eloquent on Diddā's achievement when he says: "Those treacherous ministers who during sixty years from the Laukika year 3997 (901-2 A.D.) onward had robbed sixteen kings, from King Gopāla to Abhimanyu, of their dignity, lives and riches, were quickly exterminated by the energy of Queen Diddā." The grateful queen now made Naravāhana her chief councillor with the title *Rājānaka*. But soon she was led to believe that he was trying to usurp royal power. The minister fell from her grace and ultimately committed suicide. Soon afterwards Diddā was involved in a rebellion of the *ḍāmaras* or the landed rural aristocracy. Unable to cope with the troubles, she now invited Phalguna to her side. About this time her son King Abhimanyu died in 972 A.D. and was succeeded by his young son Nandigupta.

It was a shock to Diddā, who remained engaged for about a year in building temples, monasteries and cities for acquiring religious merit. Loose character, however, was a fatal weakness in her, and this, coupled with an inordinate desire for power, soon led to a violent reaction, and she had her little grandsons, Nandigupta, Tribhuvana and Bhīmagupta, killed one after another by employing witchcraft, and then herself ascended the throne of Kāshmīr in 981 A.D.

When she made a low-born favourite named Tuṅga her chief minister, the other ministers raised a rebellion under the guidance of Prince Vigraharāja, her brother's son. Vigraharāja induced the influential Brāhmaṇas of the kingdom to enter upon a solemn fast. But the queen bought them off by a judicious distribution of gold amongst them. Vigraharāja was then utterly defeated by the Kāshmīrian forces under the leadership of Tuṅga, who next subdued Pṛithwīpāla, the rebellious feudatory ruler of Rājapurī, and forced the latter to pay tribute. Tuṅga, who was now made commander-in-chief, is also credited with the crushing of a formidable rising of the *ḍāmaras* about the close of Diddā's reign.

Diddā died in 1003 A.D.; but before her death she selected her brother's son Saṅgrāmarāja of Lohara as her heir to the throne of Kāshmīr, thereby securing a change of dynasty without any political upheaval. Scholars have rightly concluded that, in spite of the defects in her character, she was endowed with energy and statesmanship of a very high order.

Three centuries later, another lady named Koṭādevī adorned the throne of Kāshmīr for a short time about 1338 A.D.

The *Rājataraṅgiṇī,* which gives the above account of Diddā, states that the women of ancient Kāshmīr enjoyed considerable freedom. Sometimes they not only owned immovable property and managed their own estates but often even fought at the head of their troops. It is well known to historians that the *ḍāmaras* (the landed rural aristocracy) played a very important part in Kāshmīrian politics. But the reference to a *ḍāmarī,* i.e. a female *ḍāmara,* in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* (8. 3115) is really very interesting for the subject of our study. The same section of the book (verses 1136-7) speaks of a valiant woman named Chhuḍḍā who "triumphed over the malcontents with her own and the royal forces". A leader of the rebels, "having made a surprise attack on her, killed her in battle."

Similar activities of another heroic woman named Sillā (mother of Vijaya, who was a lieutenant of the Kāshmīrian king Sussala, 1112-28 A.D.) are referred to in verse 1069 of the above section. When King Sussala was fighting hard with the rebels, he was on one occasion marching with his whole army from Vijayeshwara to Shrīnagara. Soon after the king crossed the Vitastā (Jhelum) with the van of the army, the bridge suddenly gave way, and a very large body of soldiers was left behind on the other side of the river. These abandoned troops were conducted by Sillā from Vijayeshwara to Devasaras, which seems to have been her fief. Soon, however, the rebels besieged Devasaras. Sillā was defeated and killed, and the royal troops led by her were dispersed. Unfortunately, the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* refers to such facts only incidentally, and does not supply us with details of the lives of these valiant women fighters of ancient India.

(v) SOME VALIANT QUEENS

Besides the ruling queens whose history has been discussed above, there are also some others of the same kind, known to the students of Indian history and tradition.

In the course of his Indian expedition, Alexander the Great of Macedon is said to have defeated and killed in 327 B.C. a king of the modern Swat-Buner region in the North-West Frontier Province, whose name is given by the early European writers as Assakenos (Ashwaka or Ashmaka, indicating the tribe to which the king belonged). This king had his capital at the formidable fortress of Massaga, situated not very far to the north of the Malakand Pass. According to Curtius, after the death of Assakenos, his mother (possibly wife) Kleophis (possibly Kṛipī) "ruled the city and the realm" and defended herself against the invader till she was compelled to surrender to the Greek king.

In 712 A.D., the Arab general Muhammad ibn-Qāsīm defeated Dāhir (possibly Dadhirāja), king of Sind, who was killed on the battle-field of Rāwar after putting forth a valiant fight against the Arab invaders. Dāhir's queen Rānī Bāī (sometimes called Lādī or Māī) was then besieged by the Arabs in the fortress of Rāwar. The heroic queen vigorously continued the struggle with only fifteen thousand soldiers in the fort. But the Arabs conducted the siege with great intrepidity. At last the queen lost all hopes of defending herself. According to the *Chachnāmāh,* she then assembled the women in the fort and addressed them in the following words: "God forbid that we should owe our liberty to those outcaste cow-eaters. Our honour would be lost. Our respite is at an end, and there is nowhere any hope of escape. Let us collect wood, cotton and oil ; for I think we should burn ourselves and go to meet our husbands. If any wishes to save herself, she may." The queen and the ladies then entered into a house, where they burnt themselves to vindicate their honour.

2. Poetesses

In his *Kāvya-mīmāṁsā,* the celebrated author Rājashekhara (*c.* 890-940 A.D.) says, "Women also can be poets like men. Genius is inherent in persons irrespective of sex differences. It is heard and seen that princesses, daughters of ministers, courtesans and concubines are possessed of extensive knowledge of the *shāstras* (scriptures) and poetic genius." It is clear from this statement that numerous poetesses flourished in different parts of India in and before the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. Unfortunately, most of their works are lost, although specimens of the poems of some of them are found quoted by later writers, especially the compilers of anthologies of poems in Sanskrit and Prakrit. Another difficulty is that in many cases we know merely the name of a poetess and have no precise information in regard to her date and place of birth, career and achievements.

Under the circumstances, it is only possible for us to offer a brief and tentative account of the achievements of ancient Indian women in the field of literature.

(I) POETESSES QUOTED IN THE SATTASAĪ

The *Sattasaī*, usually called the *Gāthā-saptashatī*, is a Prakrit anthology attributed to Hāla, a king of the Sātavāhana family that flourished at Pratiṣhṭhāna (modern Paiṭhaṇ on the Godāvarī in the Auraṅgābād district of Hyderābād) between the first century B.C. and the third century A.D. He probably ruled in the first century A.D., though his exact date cannot be ascertained. The anthology contains seven hundred stanzas, but only about four hundred and fifty are common to the different versions of the work. The work no doubt embodies a large amount of interpolation of a later date. But it may be said that the authors quoted in it are not later than the seventh or eighth century A.D. Stanzas of the following poetesses are found in the *Sattasaī*: Anulakṣhmī, Asuladdhī, Mādhavī, Prahatā, Revā, Rohā, Shashiprabhā and Baddhāvahī. But nothing is known about the works from which the stanzas are quoted. We are also quite ignorant as to the particular regions where the poetesses flourished.

(II) POETESSES KNOWN TO RĀJASHEKHARA

Rājashekhara adorned the courts of the Gurjara-Pratīhāra king Mahendrapāla I (*c.* 885-908 A.D.), his son Mahīpāla I (*c.* 914-45 A.D.) and the Kalachuri king Yuvarāja I (first half of the tenth century). The active period of his life may therefore be assigned roughly to *c.* 890-940 A.D. An exceptionally accomplished woman named Avantisundarī, who was born in the Chāhamāna or Chauhān family, was the wife of Rājashekhara. It has been suggested that Avantisundarī was the same as Sundarā, for whose benefit her brother Dhanapāla composed the Prakrit dictionary entitled *Pāiyalachchhī* in 972-3 A.D. But there is nothing to support this identification.

Avantisundarī's views are thrice quoted by Rājashekhara in his *Kāvya-mīmāṁsā*, while his Prakrit drama entitled *Karpūra-mañjarī* is stated definitely to have been staged at her request. Three of her Prakrit stanzas are quoted by Hemachandra (1088-172 A.D.) in his *Deshī-nāmamālā* to illustrate the meanings of certain Prakrit expressions as used in the works of the poetess. These facts show beyond doubt that Avantisundarī was recognized as a rhetorician and poetess of outstanding merit. Unfortunately, none of her works has so far been discovered.

Some verses attributed to Rājashekhara in Jalhaṇa's *Sūkti-muktāvalī* (1258 A.D.) speak of the following poetesses: Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā, Vikaṭanitambā, Vijayāṅkā of Karṇāṭa (the Kannaḍa-speaking area), Prabhudevī of Lāṭa (Gujarāt) and Subhadrā. Of these the Karṇāṭī poetess Vijayāṅkā is described as Saraswatī incarnate and as a peer of Kālidāsa in the Vaidarbhī style of composition. She is sometimes identified with the poetess Vijjā, otherwise called Vidyā (Vidyāvatī), Vijjakā, Bijjākā, etc., whose poems find a place in most of the Sanskrit anthologies. She is further identified with Vijaya-bhaṭṭārikā, queen of the early Chāḷukya prince Chandrāditya, who flourished about the middle of the seventh century A.D.

Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā is placed by Rājashekhara side by side with Bāṇa as having the merit of writing in a type of the *Pāñchālī* style of composition, in which sound and sense claim equal honour. This estimate is fully justified by her verses quoted in the anthologies. The expression 'Bhaṭṭārikā' attached to her name shows that Shīlā was a queen. This is no doubt supported by her reported association with Bhojarāja, who was apparently a king. It is possible that stanzas of the same Bhojarāja have been quoted in the *Kavīndra-vachana-samuchchaya,* compiled about the beginning of the eleventh century A.D. This Bhoja seems to be no other than the famous Gurjara-Pratīhāra monarch of that name, who ruled from the city of Kanauj in *c.* 836-85 A.D. Thus Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā was probably a queen of King Bhoja I of Kanauj. Many of her verses are found in the anthologies.

A number of Vikaṭanitambā's verses have been quoted in the anthologies. One of these is found in Ānandavardhana's *Dhwanyāloka,* composed in Kāshmīr about the middle of the ninth century. Thus the poetess flourished in a period not later than the first half of that century. According to a tradition recorded in the *Shṛiṅgāra-prakāsha* of Bhoja (eleventh century), the Paramāra king of Mālwa, Vikaṭanitambā was a *punarbhū,* that is, a widow who married a second time. It is said that the husband (whether the first or the second one is not certain) of this highly qualified poetess was a big fool who wrongly pronounced words. Although this may be considerably exaggerated, it is not improbable that the poetess was really unsuitably matched.

Nothing is known about the Lāṭī poetess Prabhudevī; but a stanza of Subhadrā is quoted in Vallabhadeva's *Subhāṣhitāvalī*, probably of the fifteenth century, at least in its present form.

Rājashekhara's *Karpūra-mañjarī* mentions Tribhuvana-saraswatī as the elder sister of Mahītala-saraswatī. She may be the poetess of that name, two of whose stanzas have been quoted in the *Sadukti-karṇāmṛita* compiled by Shrīdharadāsa in 1206 A.D. in Bengal. A stanza of a poetess named Sītā, which is often found in the anthologies, is for the first time quoted by Rājashekhara in his *Kāvya-mīmāṁsā*. The poetesses Tribhuvana-saraswatī and Sītā therefore flourished before the middle of the tenth century; but no further information is available about them.

There are some other poetesses who are not specifically mentioned in the extant works of Rājashekhara, though, from other available evidence, they appear to have flourished in a period earlier than the middle of the tenth century. Some of these poetesses will be discussed in the following section.

(III) POETESSES KNOWN FROM OTHER SOURCES

The *Shārṅgadhara-paddhati* (1363 A.D.) quotes a verse from an earlier author of uncertain date named Dhanadadeva. This verse makes eloquent mention of the achievements of "Shīlā, Vijjā, Mārulā, Morikā and others" as poetesses of distinction. Of these, Shīlā seems to be no other than Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā, dealt with in the previous section. Vijjā, called by a host of other names, is also known to have flourished before Rājashekhara. One of her stanzas is found quoted in the *Abhidhā-vṛitti-mātṛikā* of Mukula, who was the son of Kallaṭa, a contemporary of King Avantivarman (855-83 A.D.) of Kāshmīr. Her stanzas have been quoted in most of the anthologies beginning with the *Kavīndra-vachana-samuchchaya*. The well known verse:

Nīlotpala-dala-shyāmāṁ Vijjākāṁ māmajānatā,
Vṛithaiva Daṇḍināpyuktaṁ sarva-shuklā Saraswatī.

—"Without knowing me, Vijjākā, dark like the petal of a blue lotus, vainly has (the poet) Daṇḍin said that the goddess of learning is all-white."—is attributed by some anthologies to the poetess herself, although some writers read *tām* (her) in place of *mām* (me) and assign it to a different author. Whoever may be the author of the verse in question, it shows that Vijjākā flourished after Daṇḍin, who may be assigned to the first half of the seventh century A.D. Thus she may be roughly placed in the latter half of the seventh or in the eighth century. It is difficult to determine which part of India was adorned by the poetess, though, as we have seen above, some scholars are inclined to think that she belonged to the south.

Of Mārulā and Morikā little is known. But some of their stanzas are quoted in Jalhaṇa's *Sūkti-muktāvalī* (1258 A.D.). It is therefore difficult to determine whether these two poetesses fall within the scope of our period.

The *Kavīndra-vachana-samuchchaya* quotes some stanzas of another poetess named Bhāvadevī, otherwise called Bhāvakadevī or Bhāvākadevī. Her stanzas are similarly quoted in the *Sadukti-karṇāmṛita* (1206 A.D.). But nothing further is known about her.

A poetess named Phalguhastinī, although she finds no place in the *Kavīndra-vachana-samuchchaya,* flourished considerably before the eleventh century. Some of her stanzas are found in later anthologies like the *Shārṅgadhara-paddhati*; but a part of one of her stanzas is found quoted in the *Kāvyālaṁkāra-sūtra-vṛitti* of Vāmana, who was a minister of King Jayapīḍa (779-813 A.D.) of Kāshmīr. Thus the poetess must have flourished before the end of the eighth century. But nothing more is known about her.

The *Sadukti-karṇāmṛita* quotes a verse under the joint authorship of Chaṇḍālavidyā, Vikramāditya and Kālidāsa, thus making a poetess named Chaṇḍālavidyā a contemporary of Kālidāsa, who flourished at the court of the Gupta Vikramādityas in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. In the present state of our knowledge, however, it is difficult to determine the genuineness of the tradition regarding the existence of a poetess of the above name in the age of the imperial Guptas.

A verse assigned by some of the later anthologists to a poetess named Jaghanachapalā is found in the *Kavīndra-vachana-samuchchaya* and other works without any reference to its author. The fact that the stanza is composed in the metre bearing the same name, however, suggests that the name of the poetess is a fabrication of later writers. The real author of the verse is unknown.

The *Shārṅgadhara-paddhati* quotes two stanzas believed to be jointly composed by the poet Bilhaṇa and the *Rājakanyā* or princess, otherwise known as Shashikalā or Chandrakalā.

Verses of a poetess named Saraswatī have been quoted in the anthologies beginning with the *Sadukti-karṇāmṛita* (1206 A.D.). But that she lived in an earlier age is indicated definitely by the quotation of one of her stanzas by Bhoja in his *Saraswatī-kaṇṭhābharaṇa* about the middle of the eleventh century.

According to some scholars, a work entitled *Rājashekhara-charita,* believed to be composed in the first quarter of the eleventh century, is said to mention the poetesses named Kāmalīlā, Kanakavallī, Sunandā, Lalitāṅgī, Madhurāṅgī and Vimalāṅgī. Of these, the last three are said to have hailed from Mālwa. But the similar formation of the names renders their existence extremely doubtful, especially in view of the fact that they are not known from any other source. We have doubts about the genuineness of the tradition ascribed to the *Rājashekhara-charita.*

Unfortunately, the works from which the stanzas of the poetesses named above have been quoted, are all lost, and it is impossible to judge from the meagre specimens the value of their contribution to literature. It must be admitted that there is not much variety in the verses, inasmuch as they are concerned in most cases with conventional erotic topics. But there are cases wherein we feel the tender and touching note of the heart of a woman.

(IV) SOME WOMEN SCHOLARS OF TRADITION

There are some traditions, recorded or floating, regarding the existence of women scholars in different parts of India. But, in most cases, they are not only unsupported by any evidence worth the name but are also often opposed to known facts of history.

The celebrated astronomer and mathematician Bhāskara flourished in Mahārāṣhṭra in the twelfth century. One of the famous mathematical works of Bhāskara is the *Līlāvatī.* There is a tradition that this work was actually composed by a widowed daughter of Bhāskara, whose name was Līlāvatī. We have also a story how Bhāskara failed to determine the auspicious moment for the celebration of his daughter's marriage owing to a defect in the *ghaṭī-yantra* (an instrument for measuring time) caused by a small stone that had fallen into it from an ornament worn by Līlāvatī. It is not unlikely that Bhāskara had a daughter named Līlāvatī who was a keen student of mathematics and astronomy ; but there is certainly no reason to believe that Bhāskara was not the authoı of the *Līlāvatī*. The false tradition regarding the authorship of the work has apparently developed out of the fact that the problems set in the *Līlāvatī* are addressed to a girl, often by expressions like *aye bāle Līlāvatī* (O young Līlāvatī), although Bhāskara may have actually written the book for teaching the subject to his own daughter.

In Bengal there are a large number of popular sayings that are attributed to a female astronomer named Khanā or probably Kṣhaṇāvatī. These sayings are in old Bengali and relate to astronomy and astrology, often with special reference to agriculture. Tradition has it that Khanā was the wife of an astronomer named Mihira, who was the son of another famous astronomer named Varāha. This tradition is apparently fabricated on the basis of the name of the celebrated ancient Indian astronomer Varāhamihira, who flourished in the sixth century A.D., but had hardly anything to do with Bengal. There may have flourished in ancient Bengal a renowned female astronomer named Khanā ; but nothing genuine about her life and time is known.

In the traditions that have grown round the illustrious name of Shaṅkarāchārya, who was a Nambūdiri Brāhmaṇa of Malabār and is usually believed to have flourished about the beginning of the ninth century A.D., there is a story about a great woman philosopher of Mithilā,—probably named Ubhayabhāratī. It is said that in the course of his *dig-vijaya* (journey for controversial victories over various philosophers and sects) Shaṅkara reached Mithilā, where he was engaged in a *shāstric* (scriptural) dispute with a great local philosopher named Maṇḍana Mishra, who was the husband of Ubhayabhāratī. According to tradition, Shaṅkara defeated Maṇḍana Mishra ; but his victory was regarded as incomplete, since he failed to accept Ubhayabhāratī's challenge on a discourse on the Kāma-shāstra (Erotics). Later, however, Shaṅkara is said to have succeeded in defeating Ubhayabhāratī in a debate, and both the husband and the wife were compelled to become followers of the great philosopher. It is difficult to determine the genuineness of the tradition regarding Ubhayabhāratī and similar traditions about other women scholars believed to have flourished in different parts of India.

CHAPTER XV

GREAT WOMEN IN SOUTH INDIA

(*c.* 400 B.C. to 1300 A.D.)*

1. Saints and Mystics

The earliest recorded references (*c.* second century B.C. to fourth century A.D.) to Buddhist women mystics and devotees are found in the inscriptions from the rock-cut *chaitya* halls and *vihāras* (monasteries) in western India and from the monuments in Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunikoṇḍa in the Guṇṭūr district. Inscriptions of a slightly later period (from the seventh century A.D.) from Shravaṇa Beḷgoḷa in Mysore and the Tamil country indicate the existence of an influential sisterhood of Jaina nuns with monastic establishments spread practically all over the south. We know very little about them; they are mere names to us. Among them, however, two stand out prominently—Guṇamatī, the mother of the celebrated Jaina monk Ajjanandi, and Paṭṭina Kuratti,[1] who had a large circle of disciples.

In the Tamil epics of the post-*Shaṅgam* period, abbesses and nuns are among the leading characters. Though essentially creations of the poets' imagination, they nevertheless portray some features of contemporary religious life. One prominent Hindu mystic who lived before the sixth century was Avvai, a brief account of whose life will be found in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The theistic movement that swept over south India from about the fifth century and grew in strength from the seventh, produced a large number of saints and mystics both of the Shaiva and Vaishṇava persuasions, among whom were some illustrious women. Another aspect of this revival is represented by Kumārila and Shaṅkara. Sarasavāṇī, wife of Maṇḍana Mishra, a follower of Kumārila, who later became a disciple of Shaṅkara, was another great woman of the age.

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* Taking the establishment of the Sultānate in Delhi in A.D. 1206 as the beginning of a new epoch in the history of north India, Chapter XIV covers the accounts of the great women in north India up to A.D. 1200. In the south, the dividing time has to be advanced by about a century. The Choḷa empire came to an end only in A.D. 1279. Madurā was under Pāṇḍyan rule even in the first quarter of the fourteenth century. In A.D. 1300 Ballāḷa III Hoysaḷa and Pratāparudra II Kākatīya were still ruling. The establishment of the empire of Vijayanagar in A.D. 1336 marks the beginning of a new epoch in the south, politically and culturally. Accordingly this chapter on the great women in south India takes the reader up to A.D. 1300.

[1] *Kuratti* is feminine for *kuravar* (Sanskrit, guru).

Tilakavati: Tilakavati and Maṅgaiyarkarashi are two women mystics mentioned in the *Tiruttoṇḍar Purāṇam,*[2] whose life of dedication to God inspired their dear ones and changed their spiritual outlook. She flourished about the 7th century A.D.

Tilakavati, a woman of the Vellāḷa community was betrothed to Kalippagai, a soldier, who immediately after went to war and died in action. Tilakavati refused to wed any other, and living the life of a nun, spent her days in the service of the Lord in the temple of Shiva at Tiruvadigai. Her brother Maruṇīkki, whom she tenderly brought up, embraced the Jaina faith. This was a great blow to Tilakavati, as she was an ardent Shaiva devotee. She prayed to the Lord to change her brother's mind, and when Maruṇīkki had acute colic, which the Jainas were unable to cure, she persuaded him to pray to Shiva. When he entered the temple and stood before the sanctum, he burst forth into song and praised the glory of the Lord. He was later known as Appar or Tirunāvukkarashar, and was hailed as one of the four greatest of the Shaiva saints. He owed his spiritual eminence to Tilakavati, whom posterity honoured by installing her image in a shrine in the temple at Tiruvadigai.

Maṅgaiyarkarashi:[3] By about the sixth century, Jainism had become predominant in the south. The rulers of the leading States professed that religion, and Jaina monks, who were royal gurus and advisers, exercised great influence over the political life of the country. Arikesarī Parāṅkusha Māravarman, popularly known as Kūṇ Pāṇḍya, who ruled in Madurā in the seventh century, was a Jaina and was surrounded by Jaina monks in his court. His queen Maṅgaiyarkarashi, a Choḷa princess, and his chief minister Kulachchirai were Shaivas, and it pained them that the king neglected the worship of Sundaresha,[4] the tutelary deity of the Pāṇḍyas. They invited Saint Sambandar to Madurā, who converted the Pāṇḍya to the Shaiva faith. Maṅgaiyarkarashi, whose virtues and piety Sambandar has extolled in his songs, is honoured as one of the Nāyanārs.

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[2] That is, 'The Purāṇa of the holy servants of God.' The prefix *tiru* is Tamil for *shrī*. The book is popularly known as *Periya* (great) *Purāṇam*.

[3] That is, 'queen among women.'

Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār: Posterity knows this saint only by the name of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (the Mother belonging to Kāraikkāl), but her real name was Punitavati. A daughter of a rich Vaishya, she married a merchant and lived at Kāraikkāl. Of a devout nature from her early childhood, her thoughts were ever centred upon the feet of Shiva, but she did not fail to discharge her duties to her husband.

One day she fed a Shaiva mendicant who asked for alms, and gave him one of the two mangoes that her husband had given her. The husband, who came home some time later, was served with the remaining one in his breakfast. When he asked for the other one, the virtuous wife did not know what to do. Loath to cause her husband disappointment, she prayed to the Lord in her difficulty, and found in the cupboard another mango, which she joyfully offered to her husband. The fruit was a divine gift, and had a flavour and sweetness that no fruit from the finest orchard could ever have. The bewildered merchant asked her how she got it, and when the story was related, he could hardly believe it, and asked her to get him another such. The lady again prayed to Shiva, and another fruit appeared. The merchant realized that his wife was no ordinary woman, but a saint worthy of reverence, with whom it would be a sin to have worldly relations. He left his house and went to the Pāṇḍya country, where he took another wife. He had a daughter by her, whom he named Punitavati after his first wife.

When the Ammaiyār learned the whereabouts of her husband, she went to him and begged him to let her live with him. The merchant, his second wife and their daughter prostrated themselves at her feet and declared that she was a goddess. This snapped all family ties, and the Ammaiyār renounced the world and became a wandering nun. She prayed that her beauty might vanish and her

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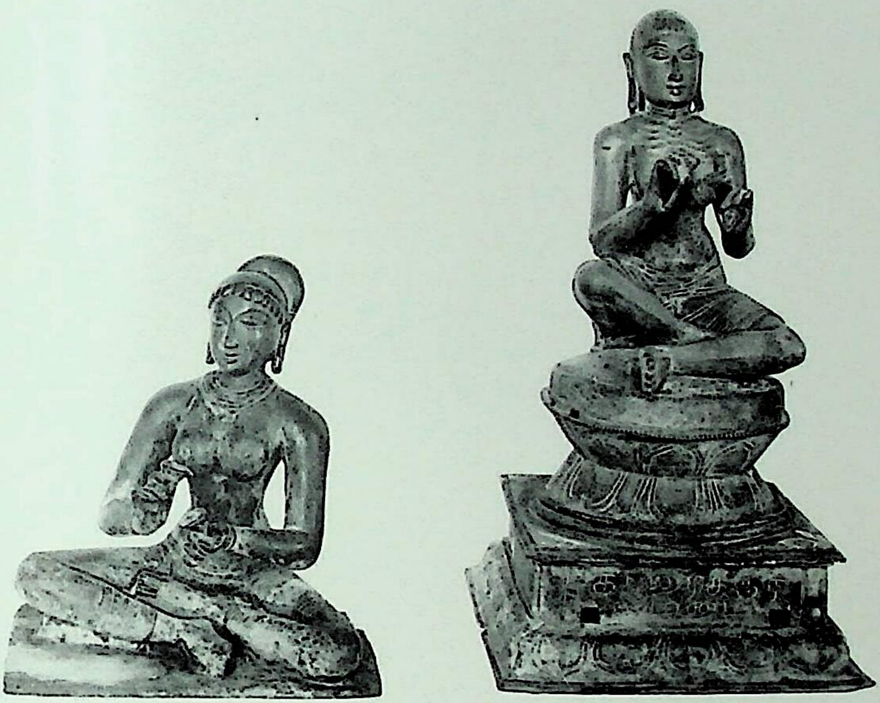
[4] The name of Shiva in the temple of Madurā.



KĀRAIKKĀL AMMAIYĀR

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form become hideous so that it might not attract the men who saw her. At the end of her wanderings, she reached Tiruvālaṅgāḍu, where she spent the rest of her life singing the glory of Lord Shiva.

Her songs are the mellifluous outpouring of a heart full of divine love. All aspects of Shiva, terrible and benign, appealed to her, and we get an insight into the nature of her realization in one of her hymns, where she proclaims that "to one who is full of love for God, the eternal Lord Hara, the originator of the universe, will reveal Himself in the heart as a flame of brilliant light." It was immaterial to her whether Nīlakaṇṭha (the blue-throated Shiva) removed her afflictions and showed her the path to salvation or not; she was sure her heart would ever enshrine Him.[5]

Saint Sambandar, who lived in the seventh century, recalls in his hymns the memory of the Ammaiyār, who must therefore have lived before his time. She is one of the sixty-three Shaiva saints, and her songs are included in the eleventh book (*Tirumurai*) of the canonical literature of Tamil Shaivism.

Kodai (*Āṇḍāḷ*): Vishṇuchitta, better known as Periyāḷvār (the great Āḷvār),[6] was a Brāhmaṇa of Shrīvilliputtūr, who established a name for scholarship by defeating rival controversialists in the court of Shrī Vallabha Pāṇḍya at Madurā. He practised *vātsalya-bhāva* (the attitude of looking upon God as child), identified himself with Yashodā, the foster-mother of Kṛishṇa, and often lost himself in the contemplation of the childish pranks and youthful sports of Kṛishṇa. He reared an extensive flower garden and occupied his time making garlands for the deity in the local temple.

One morning when he went round his garden, he saw a child of radiant beauty lying on a *tulasī* (holy basil) bed. He took her home and brought her up as his daughter. He called her Kodai (Sanskritized into Godā) and lavished all his affection on her. Young Kodai soon established such a mastery over her father's heart that the neighbours gave her the apt name *Āṇḍāḷ* (ruler). She imbibed her father's devotional fervour, and dedicated herself body and soul to Raṅganātha (Vişhṇu). She declined to wed any mortal; Raṅganātha alone was the object of her love. And every day she adorned herself with the garlands of many-hued flowers that her father had patiently made for the deity. She then stood before a mirror, dyed her lips and put on a *tilaka* (tapering mark between the eyebrows) of musk. Was she not worthy of the hand of Kṛiṣhṇa? —she repeatedly asked herself. She then restored the garlands to the basket, which later her unsuspecting father carried to the temple in time for the daily divine service. One day Viṣhṇuchitta surprised her in her toilette, and was horrified that his daughter should be guilty of such sacrilege. He cast aside the garlands, culled fresh flowers and offered them in the temple. That night the Lord appeared in his dream and expostulated with him for throwing away the garlands worn by Kodai, which were dear to Him being fragrant with the pure devotion of her unsullied heart. Viṣhṇuchitta then realized the greatness of his daughter, whom posterity has fondly named *Shūḍikkoḍuttanāchchiyār* ('the lady who offered flowers after wearing them herself').

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[5] *Arbutatiruvandādi*, a collection of her hymns.

[6] *Āḷvārs* are the twelve Vaishṇava saints, the compilation of whose hymns, about four thousand in number, is known as the *Divya-Prabandham* and is given the status of the Vedas. Periyaḷvār flourished in the ninth century.

As years passed, Kodai forgot her surroundings and lived in a world of her imagination. Shrīvilliputtūr was to her Gokula, where Kṛiṣhṇa lived in his boyhood, and its temple the palace of the prince of cowherds; she was a *gopī* (milkmaid of Vṛindāvana), and often stood hand in hand with Muralīdhara (Kṛiṣhṇa holding the flute). A covert glance at his face, and her eyes were full of the intoxication of his charms. His words—what magic was in them! She was not herself, so utterly captivated were her senses. If he was not to be seen by her side, there fell a gloom in her heart. She would address a cuckoo perched on a branch with its companion: "Thou, sweet cuckoo, thou art in the company of thy beloved, canst thou not call my beloved to my side?" She would reward the bird for this service she said, by sending her pet parrot to play with it. Such outpourings of the soul of Kodai caught in the meshes of divine love constitute the *Tirumoḷi*.

To win her divine lover, Kodai underwent the hardship of vows and penances, one of which was a thirty-day long vow in the Tamil month Mārgaḷi (Mārgashīrṣha, December-January). Rising before dawn, amidst the peal of the temple bells and the blowing of conchs, Kodai and her companions, passing for Vraja maidens, bathed and decked, assembled in the temple and rendered service. The thirty songs of this vow that Kodai sang, called *Tiruppāvai,* are amongst the most charming devotional lyrics of Tamil literature.

Kodai's intoxication was full to the brim ; she had reached the height of *madhura-bhāva* (the attitude of looking upon God as husband, and Vishṇuchitta was supremely happy ; but how to wed her to the Lord? The Lord again appeared in a dream and directed him to bring Kodai to His holy shrine at Shrīraṅgam. Kodai, clad in bridal vesture, was duly brought there ; she fell into a trance and walked into the sanctum. Tradition says that she was absorbed in the image of Raṅganātha. Rightly did Vishṇuchitta exclaim: "God-realization came to me through strenuous endeavour and constant *sādhanā* (practice), but it fell into Kodai's hands all on a sudden like a rich inheritance." It is the orthodox belief that Kodai was an incarnation of Bhū-devī, the consort of Vishṇu ; her image is set up in Vishṇu temples in the south. The garland of mystic songs that she made and offered to her Lord has enriched Tamil poetry and has been wafting its divine fragrance through the ages.

Akka-mahādevī: Among the well known Vīrashaiva mystics, of whom there were nearly sixty, Akka-mahādevī or Mahādeviyakka holds a high place. Among the literary women of Karnāṭaka few can claim equality with her. She was born (*c.* 1130) in an ordinary lower middle-class family at a place called Uḍutaḍi. It is not surprising that she became even from her infancy a devout follower of Shaivism, considering the fact that her parents were great devotees of the Lord Shiva. Since she was very beautiful, Kaushika, the chief of her town, desired to marry her. But she decided not only not to marry him, because he was not a follower of the Lord Shiva but also to renounce the world. She therefore became an ardent disciple of Basaveshwara, the founder of the Liṅgāyat cult.

From this time onwards Akka-mahādevī started giving out many of her sayings, which have become practically aphorisms, comparable in quality to those of Confucius. These are of great poetical merit, characterized by simplicity of expression, and are full of references to the daily cares, turmoils and tribulations that beset our lives. Every one of them ends with the word Chenna-Mallikārjuna, the god of her devotion. To show the universality of these Kannaḍa sayings, which number over a thousand, one of them is translated below:

"Listen, O Lord Chenna-Mallikārjuna! Having been born in this world, we must be calm without being angry in mind, if praises or censures are heaped on us. Will it do to be afraid of wild beasts after having constructed our house on the top of a mountain? Will it do to be afraid of waves and foam after having built our house on the sea-shore? Will it do to be shy of sound after having made our home in the middle of the market-place?"

She is also the author of the following religious works: (1) *Yogāṅga-trividhi,* (2) *Sṛishṭiya Vachana* and (3) *Akkagaḷa Pīṭhike.*

Evidently she was so popular that after her demise, a work was written about her entitled *Mahādeviyakkana Purāṇa,* i.e. the story of Mahādeviyakka.

It is said that towards the close of her life she went to Shrīshaila to worship her favourite deity Chenna-Mallikārjuna and eventually died there (*c.* 1166 A.D.).

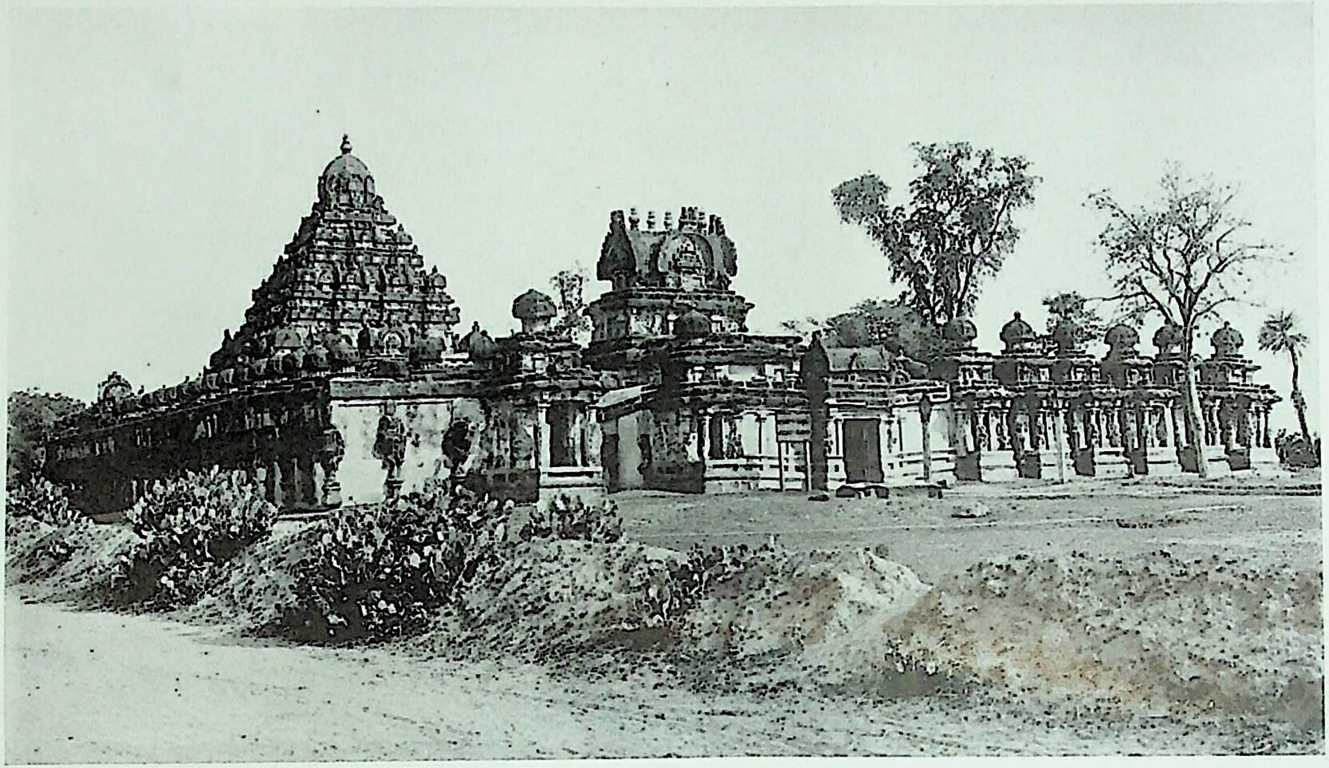
2. Pious Devotees

Saints who rise to the heights of mysticism are always few ; the generality of devotees were content with religious observances (*charyā*) and rites (*kriyā*), which usually took the form of making gifts to godly men, digging tanks and wells and building temples.

The builders of the early Buddhist shrines have recorded their names. Among them were three women.

The *stūpa* in Amarāvatī on the right bank of the Kṛishṇā near Guṇṭūr was first built about 200 B.C. Later, in the second half of the second century A.D., with the advent of Mahāyānism, it underwent a complete reconstruction and became perhaps the largest *stūpa* of the time. The kings professed brahminism, but their queens were often Buddhists who contributed to the erection of the group of superb monuments both here and at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, a few miles up the river.

Raṅgapatākā: The era round about A.D. 600 marks an important epoch in the political and cultural history of south India. It was largely influenced by the renascent cults of Hinduism shaped by the Vaishṇava and Shaiva saints. Along with these religious



KAILĀSANĀTHA TEMPLE

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movements started a new evolution in temple architecture. The old buildings in wood, brick and mortar gave place to structures in stone, rock-cut and monolithic temples and all-stone *vimānas* (main portions). What is now known as the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñchī constituted the *tour de force* in the temple architecture of this period. In raising this temple one of the queens of Pallava Rājasiṁha, Raṅgapatākā, took a notable share, as we know from a Sanskrit inscription in it. She belongs to the seventh century.

Sembiyan-mahādevī: The Choḷa kings raised temples to Shiva along the banks of the Kāverī. Gaṇḍarāditya, who ruled in the first half of the tenth century, was a saintly ruler, and his devotional hymns collected in the *Tiruvishaippa* are included in the Shaiva canonical literature. His queen Sembiyan-mahādevī was a Mālwa princess. Widowed early in life, Mahādevī scorned all sense-pleasures, developed a devotional frame of mind and spent her wealth in renovating or building temples in different places and in other works of charity.

Countless are the bronze images representing the different aspects of Shiva that she consecrated in the temples. She made a gift of lands to the temples, as also jewels of every description and of enormous value and hundreds of gold, silver and copper vessels. Other endowments relate to the feeding of Brāhmaṇas employed to chant the Vedas in the temples, and to the maintenance of musicians and other artists.

Mahādevī had grown old when Rājarāja I came to the throne. She then enjoyed a privileged position as the emperor's venerable grand-aunt. Rājarāja honoured her memory by building a public hall at Tirumukkūḍal named after her.

Kundavai: Another great temple-builder among Choḷa queens was Kundavai, the elder sister of Rājarāja I. Her father Sundara Choḷa Purāntaka II was a very just and upright king. Her mother Vānavan-mahādevī was a Malayamān princess, who performed sati at her husband's death. Kundavai married Vandyadeva, chief of the country round about Brahmadesham. At Rājarājapuram (now called Dādāpuram), situated within this area, she built a Vishṇu temple, a Shiva temple and a Jaina temple, to all of which she made costly presents. In Tirumalai, a great Jaina centre in the South Arcot district, she also consecrated a shrine to one of the Tīrthaṅkaras. She founded a free hospital at Tanjore, and set apart extensive lands for its maintenance.

Kundavai spent the last years of her life with her nephew Rājendra I in the palace at Paḷaiyārai, where she died in A.D. 1019 in the seventh year of the latter's reign.

Kuṅkuma-mahādevī: Iṇ the Kannaḍa country, the home of the Chāḷukya style of architecture, among the early temple-builders and philanthropists, we may mention Kuṅkuma-mahādevī, the younger sister of the Chāḷukya Vijayāditya (A.D. 696-733). She constructed a large Jaina temple (Jina-bhavana) at Purigere (modern Lakṣhmeshwar, Dharwar district, Bombay State), which became famous. She induced her brother to donate a village to a Brāhmaṇa. She also performed the ceremony of *Hiraṇya-garbha,* which involved in her case such costly presents as elephants and chariots.

From one of the inscriptions we learn that she was the wife of the brave and generous Ālupa king Chitravāhana, who ruled over Banavāsi and extended the Chāḷukya power.

Loka-mahādevī: Loka-mahādevī, the principal queen of the Chāḷukya king Vikramāditya II of Bādāmi, built the temple of Lokeshwara (now known as the Virūpākṣha temple), at a place called Paṭṭadakal (Bijāpur district, Bombay State). In recognition of the skill displayed in its construction, she exempted the entire class of builders of that district from payment of certain taxes. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy calls this temple "one of the noblest structures in India." She also conferred on the musicians and dancers (*gandharvas*) a number of privileges. One of these, by name Achalā, seems to have founded a new school of dancing.

Dānachintāmaṇi Attimabbe: In the last quarter of the tenth century A.D., when the Chāḷukyan emperor Taila II was ruling, there lived a lady who was destined to become famous as Dānachintāmaṇi Attimabbe. She was born in a family of learned men. Her father Mallapayya, a general, was a great scholar, a reputed astrologer, an excellent teacher of archery and a patron of learning. She and her sister Guṇḍamabbe were married to Nāgadeva, com-

BṚIHADISHWARA TEMPLE

mander-in-chief of the Chāḷukyan armies and son of Dhallapa, the prime minister.

In one of his master's campaigns, Nāgadeva was killed, and his second wife performed sati. Attimabbe was persuaded not to follow her sister's example, because her son Aṇṇigadeva was still very young.

She was a devout follower of Jainism, and was responsible for its spread during that period of its decline. For this purpose she got prepared a thousand manuscript copies of the *Shāntinātha Purāṇa*, a Jaina religious work written by a court poet called Ranna. Her generous help enabled the poet to write a highly important book on Jainism entitled *Ajita Purāṇa*. She was held in high esteem by the citizens of the Chāḷukyan empire and even by Emperor Taiḷa himself. A number of miracles are attributed to her.

That her title of *Dānachintāmaṇi* (unstinting donor) was well merited, is evident from the fact that she gave away one thousand and five hundred golden images of Jina set with precious stones. From two inscriptions of A.D. 1007 found at Lakkundi (near Gadag) of the Dharwar district, we learn that she was responsible for the construction of a number of Jaina *bastis* (temples), for the maintenance of one of which she gave away a village named Suruki.

Rebbaladevī: Outside the royal families also, there were people who constructed temples and instituted charities. Towards the close of the eleventh century, during the reign of the Chāḷukya king Tribhuvanamalladeva (Vikramāditya VI), a brahmin lady called Rebbaladevī earned a great reputation for building a temple to Keshavadeva at her birthplace, Hūvina-Haḍgali, in the Bellary district (Madras State), which was noted for its Vedic lore. She was the wife of a brave general called Ravideva, who was also very charitably disposed.

Besides donating enough land for the service of the deity, Rebbaladevī established a feeding-house for brahmins. She was a mine of *dharma* (piety) and well versed in learning and in the fine arts, and was universally respected.

Shāntaḷā: Under the influence of Rāmānuja, King Biṭṭiga Hoysaḷa changed his Jaina faith for Vaiṣhṇavism and assumed the name of Viṣhṇuvardhana. His queen Shāntaḷā, however, remained a Jaina. Her father was a Shaiva and her mother a Jaina. A lovely woman of remarkable intelligence and strong will, she was an expert in music, dancing and other fine arts. In A.D. 1123 she built a temple with a tank and garden for Shānti Jina at Shravaṇa Beḷgoḷa, the holiest of Jaina places in the south, and endowed a village to meet the cost of daily worship and the feeding of ascetics. Her faith did not stand in the way of her close association with her husband in his charities. Viṣhṇuvardhana's temples at Belūr are among the finest specimens of Hoysaḷa art, and the image of Keshava that he set up is a masterpiece. Equally remarkable is another image of Viṣhṇu that Shāntaḷā got consecrated. Shānti-grāma, a village which the king gave her, she set apart for learned brahmins. She is praised in the inscriptions as the 'upholder of the four faiths' (Vaiṣhṇava, Shaiva, Jaina and Buddhist).

She died in A.D. 1131 at Shivagaṅgā, and her sorrowing mother performed *sallekhana* (death by fasting) at Shravaṇa Beḷgoḷa.

3. Poetesses

The culture of the ancient Tamils is mirrored in the anthologies that constitute the literature of the *Shaṅgam* period.[7] We gather from these poems the names of kings and chiefs, and of the bards who extolled their achievements in love and war. Among the poets were some princes and princesses.

Ādi Mandi and Veḷḷi Vīdi: Ādi Mandi, a daughter of Karikāla Choḷa, married Āṭṭan Atti, a Chera prince. The prince, who one day went to bathe in the Kāverī, did not return, and no trace of him could be found. The princess ran along the river bank calling out his name in her anguish until she reached the sea-shore, where she saw a vision of him as emerging from the waves.

Her poetry reflects the poignancy of a woman separated from her beloved. Kannaki, the heroine of the *Shilappadikāram,* mentions six virtuous women who, unable to bear the loss of their lovers, pined and died, and Ādi Mandi is second in that list.

Equally expressive of the pathos of the parting of true lovers are the songs of Veḷḷi Vīdi, another poetess of this age.

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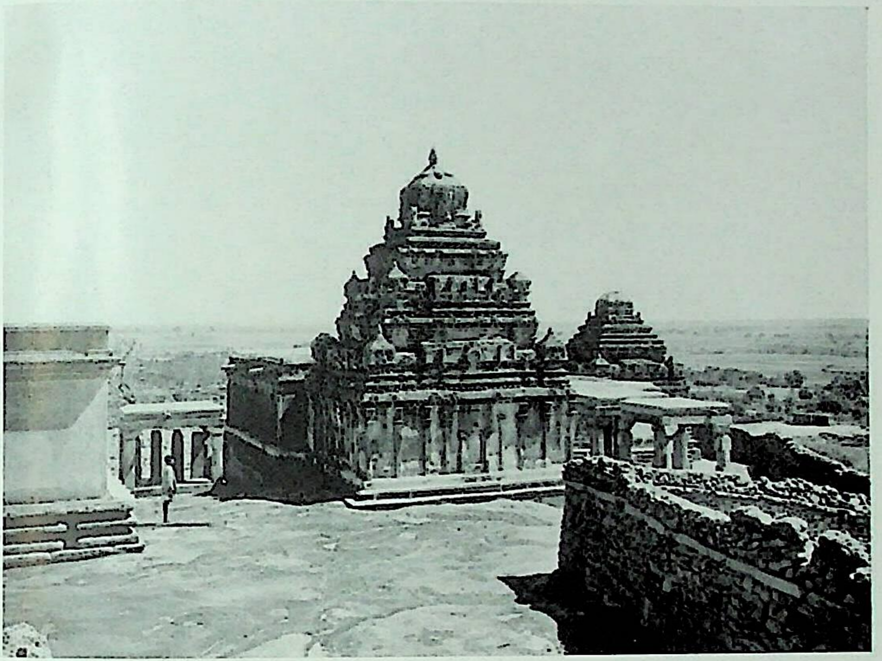
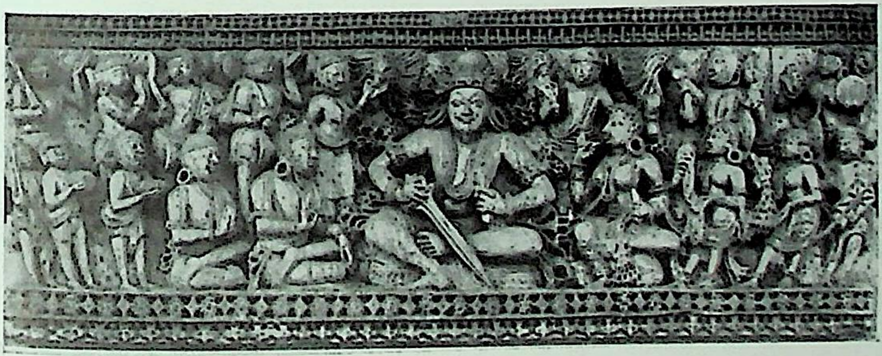
[7] From the Christian era till about the fourth century A.D.





Above : SAVANTIGANDHAVĀRAṆA BASTI
Below : KING VIṢHṆUVARDHANA AND HIS QUEEN SHĀNTALĀ
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Pūda Pāṇḍya's Queen: Two hymns are attributed to a queen of Pūda (Bhūta) Pāṇḍya who, notwithstanding the entreaties of the elders immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her lord. "The woes of widowhood and life without my beloved," she sang, "are the terrible fire from which I run away, while the flames of the funeral pyre of my beloved beckon to me like a cool and refreshing brook studded with lotus blossoms."

Aṅgavai and Sheṅgavai: One of the hymns in the *Puram* collections was sung by two sisters Aṅgavai and Sheṅgavai, daughters of Veḷ Pāri, a chieftain, great alike as warrior and patron of letters. "An unconquerable hero, he fell a victim to foul treachery, and his orphaned girls were exiled from their home. The hymn is an exquisite pen-picture of their sufferings in their exile, presented in sharp contrast to their past life of affluence and luxury in their palace at Parambunāḍ.

Avvai: The professional bards of ancient Tamil land came from the lower classes of society. They formed a distinct class called the *pāṇar* (from *paṇ*, a piece of music). Perhaps the greatest person of this class was Avvai, whose name has become synonymous with wisdom. Tradition ascribes to her a strange parentage—a Brāhmaṇa father and a low caste mother brought up in a Brāhmaṇa family. Her poetic talents were first discovered by Būda, a petty chieftain of Pulvelūr on the Peṇṇār. She then lived for many years in the court of Neḍumān Añji, the Aḍigaimān chief of Tagaḍūr (Dharmapurī), who held her in such esteem that he entrusted to her an embassy to the chief of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. The heroic death of her patron, the Aḍigaimān, immersed her in grief; and she continued to live in Tagaḍūr for some years more to console his son Eḷini. For vigour and depth of feeling her odes to the Aḍigaimān are second to none in the *Puram* collections.

Leaving Tagaḍūr, she wandered through the Chera country, honoured alike by prince and peasant. She attended the *Rājasūya* sacrifice performed by the Choḷa king Perunarkiḷḷi, which drew a large assemblage of crowned heads including the Chera and Pāṇḍya kings, who paid their homage to Avvai. In her benedictory odes she held up high ideals before the three great monarchs, "the lords of the white umbrellas and pennoned chariots shining like the three sacred fires which the twice-born tend day and night with ceaseless vigil, and rulers of this heavenlike country (Tamiḷnāḍ), . . . belonging in truth to the saintly." These ideals were charity, succour to the needy and protection of the people. She observed, "Only the good deeds that you do now will stand by you at the time of your death."

She then visited the important places in the Choḷa country and went to Tirukovalūr (Tirukoyilūr), where she persuaded the local chief to wed the orphaned daughters of Veḷ Pāri.

Avvai took her themes from life in the palace and in the country farm. The simple pleasures and daily cares of the lowly appealed to her even more than the chivalry of heroes and the magnificence of princes. Her odes, which are included in the principal *Shaṅgam* collections, the *Narṭriṇai,* the *Kuruntogai,* the *Neḍumtogai* and the *Pura-nānūru* (*Puram* 400), are a true mirror of contemporary Tamil life. With a rare economy of words, she creates marvellous pen-pictures, and to poetic imagery she adds choice moral precepts. She is a great exponent of morality ; her pithy aphorisms are lisped by Tamil children even today as an introduction to Tamil poetry and a guide to moral life.

There is an image of Avvai in a temple in Tulasiyāpaṭṭaṇam (Tirutturaipuṇḍi taluk of the Tanjore district), but more abiding than this are her verses which the Tamil race will continue to cherish.

Veṇṇikuyatti: A potter woman of Veṇṇi (identified with Kovil Veṇṇi, fifteen miles to the east of Tanjore), who was an eye-witness to the sanguinary battle which was fought near her village, admires the valour of Karikāla Choḷa, the victor, but does not fail to express her sympathy for the vanquished Chera king who expiated his cowardice by committing suicide: "O descendant of that warrior who, sailing on the wide ocean, compelled the winds to fill the sails of his ship! O Karikāl-vaḷava, lord of mighty elephants, by this victory thou hast displayed the greatness of thy valour. . . . Is not he (the foe) even nobler than thee—he who, after obtaining great celebrity in the world, feels now the shame of a wound in his back and fasts unto death on the plain of Veṇṇi watered by the freshes of the Kāverī?"

Note the delicacy of touch in the latter part of the ode, which evokes sympathy for the fallen foe.

Nappashalai: Equally delicate in pathos is another lyric expressive of grief at the destruction of the fair city of Karūr by the impetuous Kiḷḷi-vaḷava, another Choḷa king of old:

> "Thou scion of the Choḷa Lord who saved
> The dove from woe[8]—chief of the wrathful hosts,
> Armed with the gleaming darts that work havoc,
> As when a fiery dragon, angry, fierce,
> Bearing five heads, with gleaming poisonous tooth,
> Has entered the vast mountainous cavern, where
> The golden creepers twine, and from the sky
> Fire issues forth and loudest thunderbolt;
> Thou saw'st the lordly city old, whose king
> Was circled round by girded elephants.
> There in dark deep moat alligators congregate.
> In the wide waters of the guarded lake
> Are crocodiles that fierce in fight
> Dart forth to catch the shadows cast
> By gleam of watchman's torch at midnight hour.
> Its walls like burnished copper shone.
> *This seemed not fair to thine eyes*; for thou didst
> Work destruction mightily, glorious king!"

Nappashalai, who sang the above lyric, was a native of Mārokkam in the south Pāṇḍya country. Her odes were admired by all the leading princes of the day. There is much art in the following ode praising Kiḷḷi's generosity, justice and might:

> "Descendant of him who to save a dove from grief entered the balance, . . . *giving in grace* was born with thee, and is not thy peculiar praise!
>
> And, when one ponders how thy sires of old destroyed the mighty fort suspended in the sky which foes dreaded to approach—*to slay thy foes* is not thy peculiar praise!
>
> And since the council of Uraiyūr, impregnable city of the valiant Choḷas, is the home of Equity;—*Justice* is not thy peculiar praise!

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[8] Shibi.

O Vaḷavan![9] Swift horseman, whose stout arms are like fortress-bars, whose wreath attracts every eye, how then shall I sing thy praise?"

Nappashalai's ode on the death of Kiḷḷi is marked by a quaintness of conceit in her address to Death:

"If in his mind against thee he were wroth,
Or if in outward act he showed his rage,
Or if he touched thee with afflictive hand,
Thou couldst not have escaped, O Death!
Thou took'st great Vaḷavan, entreating him,
Like minstrels, bowing low, with suppliant hand,
Praising, thou didst bear off his life,
Leader of hosts that crowd the glorious field,
Crowned with gold wreath, Lord of the mighty car!"[10]

A huntress, a gypsy (Korava) woman and a nurse are among the other poetesses whose songs have been collected in the old anthologies.

The *Shaṅgam* works depict the culture of an epoch extending for three or four centuries after the Christian era—a culture composite in character depicting the blending of Aryan ideals with those of the Tamils. Here we have a picture of the social life of the people, their domestic life, quarrels, friendships and jealousies, their gods and rituals. The poems constitute a unique human document; much of their imagery may have been drawn from accepted conventions, but those coventions must have been based on facts of life. As works of art these poems will stand comparison with the finest specimens of literature in any language. To the eminent contribution that women made to the culture of this epoch, the above sketches will bear ample testimony.

Women of the Kannaḍa country have distinguished themselves in intellectual as well as other pursuits from very early times. The reputed example of Vijaya-mahādevī or Vijaya-bhaṭṭārikā, the poetess, has been dealt with in the preceding chapter.

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[9] Vaḷavan, that is, Choḷa.

[10] In the translation of the odes, the present writer has adopted those of Kanakasabhai, P.T.S. Aiyangar and Pope.

Kāntī: Kāntī (*c*. A.D. 1100), the first great Kannaḍa poetess so far known, adorned the court of the famous Hoysaḷa king Ballāḷa I, who was a great patron of learning. Nāgachandra, who called himself Abhinava (new) Pampa and was her contemporary in the same court, thought—and others also did the same about him—that he had the ability to write as ably as the first Kannaḍa poet Pampa, who had lived in the tenth century.

Often there used to be contests in poetical composition between Kāntī and Nāgachandra. That she had the ability to cross swords with a poet of his calibre is an indication of her talent. Though born in a middle-class family, by sheer merit she was able to find a place for herself in the company of the great court poets. The verses which go by the name of *Kāntī-Hampana Samasyegaḷu* are the main source of information about her. We learn, for instance, that Nāgachandra had a great ambition to be praised by Kāntī. But she would never praise him openly, though she had high regard for him. So in order to coax a euology out of her, he pretended to be dead on a certain day and had the news of his death spread throughout the town. Of course Kāṇtī believed the rumour and lamented over his death selecting the highest possible epithets, calling him 'the king among poets,' etc. The ambition of Nāgachandra was thus fulfilled.

Some of her verbal contests with Nāgachandra are very interesting and can be read in the verses already mentioned. That she was a poetess of a very high order is also borne out by the fact that a poet of a later generation, Bāhubalī (A.D. 1560), praises her in very laudatory terms, and even calls her Abhinava-Vāg-devī (the new goddess of learning).

4. QUEENS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Shīla-mahādevī: One of the most renowned queens who had joint authority with the king to rule over a big territory was an able princess of the Rāṣhṭrakūṭa dynasty, who flourished in the eighth century. This was Shīla-mahādevī, wife of the Rāṣhṭrakūṭa king, Dhruva. History tells us that the Rāṣhṭrakūṭas were very powerful monarchs and that their empire was a very large one. It extended from even beyond the Vindhyas in the north to the kingdom of the Pallavas in the south. The extension to the north was due to

King Dhruva. He also defeated the Pallava king as well as the Gaṅga king in the south. The very fact that such a powerful ruler should hold authority conjointly with his queen is an indication of Shīla-mahādevī's high place in the administration of the country. She was the daughter of a mighty monarch named Viṭṭarasa, who had the titles of Sarvalokāshraya and Vishṇuvardhana (apparently Vishṇuvardhana IV of the Eastern Chāḷukya dynasty). We learn from epigraphical evidence that this lady was generous towards learned Brāhmaṇas. We also learn from the same source that she had the power to grant even very large gifts without needing the consent of her husband. The two Brāhmaṇas to whom she made the gift of a village are mentioned as great religious students, one of them being well versed in the four Vedas.

The order containing the grant is addressed to provincial governors and a succession of other officers. The concluding portion of the record reveals to us that the document was made according to the orders, not of King Dhruva, but of Shīla-mahādevī, who is described as *parameshwarī* and *parama-bhaṭṭārikā,* which indicates her paramountcy. All this shows that she exercised supreme authority over the whole of the Rāshṭrakūṭa dominions.

A famous Sanskrit poetess named Shīlā-bhaṭṭārikā has been mentioned by Rājashekhara (of the ninth century) as a peer of Bāṇa in the Pāñchālī style. Dhanadadeva also speaks of her as a renowned poetess and places her in the same class as Vijjakā. The suffix *bhaṭṭārikā* perhaps indicates that she was of royal descent, in which case she may be possibly identified with the queen Shīla-mahādevī.

Akkadevī: In the list of the famous heroines and administrators of Karnāṭaka, the name of Akkadevī (*c.* A.D. 1010-64) stands very high. She was a Chāḷukyan princess who ruled over various divisions of the Chāḷukya dominions, such as Banavāsi, Kisukāḍu and Māsavāḍi for nearly half a century. This great administratrix was the daughter of Dashavarman and Bhāgaladevī and was the sister of Vikramāditya V and Jayasiṁha II, both Chāḷukyan emperors of Kalyāṇa. She is described in inscriptions as fierce in battle and as having subjugated a large number of enemies. She laid siege to Gokage, probably to quell some local insurrection. She is also described as a marvel of virtuous qualities and as unswerving in her promises. The seat of her government was Vikramapura (modern Arashibidi, Bijāpur district, Bombay State).

She seems to have married the Kadamba chieftain, Mayūravarman, who along with her ruled Banavāsi in A.D. 1037. They had a son called Toyimadeva, who ruled the Banavāsi region as a feudatory of the Chāḷukyan emperor Someshwara I in A.D. 1064. Her name is associated with the foundation of a number of temples. She also evinced great interest in promoting education. An inscription of A.D. 1021 says that she made a gift of large plots of land to feed and clothe five hundred students and provided them with free quarters. The fact that she reigned not only in conjunction with her husband but also independently is an indication that she was "a personage of considerable reputation and importance" in her time, and no less than three successive Chāḷukyan emperors had confidence in her administrative ability.

Nāyakurālu: The story of this Telugu heroine is celebrated in song and legend. Believed to be a foundling brought up by a farmer, Nāgamma, as she was named by her foster-father, married a rich man and on his death inherited a vast fortune. She succeeded in winning the favour of Anugurāja (12th century), a Haihaya prince, who ruled over the small principality of Palnāḍ, which he had received as a wedding present. The chief had three wives and several sons.

The growing influence of Nāyakurālu in the court was resented by the minister Doḍḍa, who resigned his office in favour of his son Brahma. Brahma soon brought about the assassination of the chief.

Nāyakurālu's influence continued in the reign of the next chief Nalagama, and she was practically the ruler. The minister Brahma persuaded the chief to partition his kingdom. Mallideva, one of the half-brothers of the chief, established his rule at Macherla with Brahma as his minister. The other brothers of the chief lived with Mallideva.

Nāyakurālu did not like this division of the kingdom. She challenged Mallideva and Brahma to a cock fight, the wager being that the defeated party should surrender all territory to the victorious rival and live in the forest for seven years. In the contest Brahma's cock was killed, and he along with his master and his half-brother retired to the forests of Nallagoṇḍa. Harassed constantly by the agents of Nāyakurālu, their life in exile was miserable. On the expiry of seven years, they returned and demanded the restoration of their territory, which was refused. In the fight that ensued, Nāyakurālu donned armour and fought at the head of her army, but was defeated and captured. The battle was sanguinary, and all the half-brothers of Nalagama perished. Brahma generously restored the whole kingdom to Nalagama.

Nāyakurālu had a talent for intrigue and organization, and her life of adventure was cast in a heroic mould.

Rudrāmbā: Rudrāmbā was the eldest daughter of the Kākatīya king Gaṇapatideva, whom she succeeded on the throne and ruled over the kingdom for well over three decades. Gaṇapati had no male issue, but had two daughters, Rudrāmbā and Gaṇapāmbā, both endowed with great intelligence and exceptional abilities. Determined to keep the sovereignty in his own family, he recognized the former as his heir, and bestowing on her the name of Rudradeva Mahārāja, he took special interest in her education and gave her practical training in the administration by associating her in his government in the last years of his reign.

Rudrāmbā ascended the throne on the death of her father in A.D. 1262 ; she was not, however, accepted as sovereign by all sections of her subjects immediately. The feudatory nobles of the southern Āndhra country, whom her father had recently reduced to subjection, saw in the accession of a woman to the throne an excellent opportunity to set up the standard of rebellion and regain their independence. Of these the most important was the Kāyastha chief Ambadeva, who ruled over a large part of the Rāyalasīma from his capital Vellūru near Cuddapah. About the same time, Mahādeva, the Yādava king of Devagiri, taking advantage of the internal troubles, invaded the Kākatīya dominions from the west. As all the ministers and the officers of the kingdom remained faithful to her, Rudrāmbā was able not only to suppress the rebels and bring them back to subjection but also to repel the Yādava monarch after inflicting a defeat on his forces. Peace and order were restored, and during the remaining years of her reign (till 1295 A.D.), she ruled in perfect security free from the attacks of enemies, both internal and external.

Rudrāmbā was a wise ruler, who strove hard to promote the welfare of her subjects. She caused tanks, canals and wells to be dug in order to provide water to the agriculturists; granted concessions to merchants to promote trade and industry; built hospitals and provided for their maintenance; endowed religious foundations with rich gifts of land; and founded Brāhmaṇa settlements to encourage learning. It was probably during Rudrāmbā's reign that the famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo passed through the coastal Āndhra country and visited Moṭupaḷḷi and other important commercial and industrial centres of the kingdom. He bears testimony to the flourishing condition of its foreign trade and domestic industry, specially diamond mining, for which the kingdom was famous.

Rudrāmbā married a Kṣhatriya prince called Vīrabhadra of the Eastern Chāḷukya family. Like her father she had no sons; but she had two daughters, Mummadamma and Ruyyamma. The former married a Chāḷukya prince called Mahādeva. They had a son named Pratāparudra, whom Rudrāmbā adopted and appointed heir-apparent. Rudrāmbā was a staunch Shaiva, but was tolerant towards the other sects. An inscription from Malkāpuram dated A.D. 1261 is of much interest and throws light upon the nature of the queen's charities. It relates to the gift made by her, in accordance with the expressed wishes of her father, of the village of Mandaram on the southern bank of the Kṛiṣhṇā to the *rāja-guru* (royal preceptor) Vishweshwara Shambhu, head of the Pāshupata or Kālamukha sect. The queen made other subsidiary grants too. At Mandaram, Vishweshwara Shambhu built a temple, round which grew a township inhabited by Brāhmaṇas from different regions, artisans, musicians, dancers, village guards and servants, among whom all the lands mentioned in the gift were distributed. A hospital and a college were established in the town, and in the feeding houses people of all sects and castes were fed. Rudrāmbā's kingdom was then the live centre of the Pāshupata sect. She spent the last years of her life in meditation under the guidance of Pāshupata priests.

Gaṇapāmbā: Gaṇapāmbā was the second daughter of the Kākatīya king Gaṇapati and the younger sister of Queen Rudrāmbā of Waraṅgal. Though not as famous as her elder sister, Gaṇapāmbā deserves to be remembered as one of the few Āndhra women who actually wielded the sceptre and governed a kingdom in their own right.

Of the early history of Gaṇapāmbā very little is known. It may, however, be presumed that she was carefully brought up and educated in the same way as her elder sister. Gaṇapāmbā was married into the family of Koṭa chiefs, who ruled over the 'six-thousand country' from their capital Dharaṇikoṭa on the Kṛishṇā. Her marriage was probably contracted on account of diplomatic considerations. Her father Gaṇapati wanted an ally to further his schemes of conquest of the Velanāḍu chiefs. He therefore entered into an alliance with Rudradeva of Koṭa, and strengthened the bond of friendship by bestowing the hand of his daughter Gaṇapāmbā on Beta, the son and heir of Rudradeva.

Much is not known about Beta's rule. He seems to have joined the southern expedition of his father-in-law Gaṇapati against Kāñchī, in the course of which he lost his life. Gaṇapāmbā, who was carrying on the administration of the 'six-thousand country' in the absence of her husband, assumed on his death (some time before A.D. 1253) the reins of the government and ruled the principality for well over forty years as its undisputed ruler.

Gaṇapāmbā was a wise and enlightened ruler, and under her motherly care the people of the 'six-thousand country' were prosperous and contented. It is not unlikely that the account of the queen of the country given by the famous Venetian traveller Marco Polo, who passed through the Āndhra country during this period, refers to Gaṇapāmbā herself rather than her elder sister.

Gaṇapāmbā was a staunch Shaiva by faith. She built two temples to Shiva, one in memory of her husband and another in honour of her father. She set up gold *kalashas* (pitchers) on the *gopura* (gate) of the Amareshwara temple at Amarāvatī, and granted an *agrahāra* (settlement) to the Brāhmaṇas. She spent her last days in peace and tranquillity in contemplation of Maheshwara.

Uṇṇiyarcha: The old ballads of north Malabār (*Vaḍakkil-pāṭṭugaḷ*) contain a tale of a brave girl (early seventeenth century) who saved the women of her village from being forcibly kidnapped, and in the end brought about communal amity.

Uṇṇiyarcha, sister of Aromal Chevakar, a doughty warrior, was married to Kunhirāman, a coward. One day she wanted to visit a temple of Ayyappan, a few miles from her village, but her mother-in-law refused to permit her to leave the house even in the company of her husband. Nothing daunted, the girl took her favourite sword, and with her husband proceeded in the direction of the temple. The headman of the Chonakas (*yavanas*) who happened to see her on the way, was enamoured of her beauty and sent his men to carry her away by force. Uṇṇiyarcha drew her sword and killed some of them. The rest fled and brought the headman himself to the scene, who soon discovered that she was the sister of his fencing master. He appealed to both the brother and sister to pardon him, but Uṇṇiyarcha was inexorable and challenged him and his men to a fight. The chief of the place, who was appealed to, persuaded the girl to sheath her sword, which she did on the headman promising that no woman of the place would be molested in future.

CHAPTER XVI

GREAT HINDU WOMEN IN NORTH INDIA

(*c*. 1201 to 1800 A.D.)

As IN the earlier period (*c*. 400 B.C.—1200 A.D.), dealt with in Chapter XIV, so during the period under review women distinguished themselves in the political, literary and artistic fields. A few prominent characters are being described here.

1. HEROIC RĀJPUT WOMEN

Saṁyogitā: In the bardic traditions of Rājasthān relating to this period, there are thrilling references to the selfless patriotism and heroic exploits of her daughters. But it is difficult to say how far their account may be regarded as historical. The first example in this category is Saṁyogitā, daughter of Jaychandra, the Gāhaḍavāla ruler of Kanauj. How she married Pṛithwīrāj in a *swayaṁvara* (self-choice) ceremony is too well known to need repetition. When Mu'izuddīn Muhammad of Ghūr marched with reinforced troops for the second time to meet his Rājput adversary Pṛithwīrāj on the field of Tarain near Thānesar, she is said to have "armed her lord for the encounter" and exhorted him with the following words: "To die is the destiny not only of man but of the gods: all desire to throw off the old garment; but to die well is to live for ever. Think not of self, but of immortality; let your sword divide your foe, and I will be your *ardhāṅga* hereafter."[1] Pṛithwīrāj fought with reckless valour, but was at last overpowered and killed by the invaders. True to her vow, his devoted spouse sacrificed her life by mounting his funeral pyre.

Kurmā Devī: Another Rājput lady, Kurmā (Karma?) Devī, a princess of Pāṭaṇ and a queen of the brave Rājput chief Samarsi (Samar Singh) of Chitor, possessed military valour as well as skill in administration. Samar Singh, whom the bard represents as "the

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[1] Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (Crooke's Edition), Vol. 2, pp. 725-7.

Ulysses of the host,"[2] fought desperately against the invading army of Mu'izuddīn Muhammad, but was vanquished and slain by the latter in the second battle of Tarain in 1192. Samar Singh's son and heir, Karan, was a minor, and during his minority his mother Kurmā Devī "nobly maintained what his father left. She headed her Rājputs and gave battle in person to Kutbu-d-din, near Amber, when the viceroy was defeated and wounded."[3]

Padminī: Padminī, queen of Rānā Ratan Singh of Mewār and a lady of exquisite beauty, has been deservedly given an exalted place in the epic of Rājput chivalry by Col. Tod and also by Mālik Muhammad Jayasī in his *Padmāvat,* a classic work of Hindi literature. Modern historians do not believe in the veracity of the traditional account that the immediate cause for 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī's invasion of Chitor was his infatuation for Padminī. There is no explicit mention of this story in contemporary chronicles and epigraphs, and it may have been a concoction of later writers.[4] But history records the chivalrous role of Padminī and a number of other women of Mewār at the time when the famous citadel of Chitor was besieged by 'Alā'uddīn. The valiant Rājputs offered a heroic resistance against his onslaught for about eight months, but had at last to give way in view of the superior numerical strength of the Delhi army. Before the final surrender of the citadel, however, on the 26th August, 1303, the brave Rājput women, under the leadership of Padminī, plunged themselves into the fire of *jauhar* (self-immolation) to escape "pollution and captivity." "The funeral pyre was lighted," as Col. Tod describes, "within the 'great subterranean retreat,' in chambers impervious to the light of the day, and the defenders of Chitor beheld in procession the queens, their own wives and daughters, to the number of several thousands. The fair Padminī closed the throng, which was augmented by whatever of female beauty or youth could be tainted by Tartar lust. They were conveyed to the cavern, and the opening closed upon them, leaving them to final security from dishonour in the devouring element."[5] Thus Padminī and many others of her sex preferred heroic death to a disgraced existence.

[2] Tod, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 301.

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 303-4.

[4] K. S. Lal, *History of the Khaljis*, pp. 120-30.

[5] Tod, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 311.

Tārā Bāī: Tārā Bāī, a Rājput woman of remarkable military prowess, flourished in the beginning of the sixteenth century.[6] She was the daughter of Rāo Surthan, chief of Bednore, who belonged to the Solaṅki tribe, descended from the famous Chāḷukya kings of Aṇahillavāḍa. Under the pressure of Muslim invasions in the thirteenth century they migrated to central India and got possession of Tonk Thodā. Deprived of Thodā also by the Muslims, Surthan occupied Bednore. At this critical moment of reverses at the hands of the invaders, Tārā Bāī, inspired by the ancient glories of her land, "learned to guide the war-horse and throw with unerring aim the arrow from his back, even while at speed." Mounted on a fiery horse and armed with a bow and quiver, Tārā Bāī joined the cavalcade in its unsuccessful efforts to rescue Thodā from the invaders. Jaimall, the third son of Rānā Raimall, opened proposals for her hand. "Redeem Thodā," replied the star of Bednore, "and my hand is thine." But Jaimall was soon killed by the indignant father because of his unbecoming haste to get possession of her.

The deceased's brother Pṛithwīrāj expressed a determination to redeem Jaimall's pledge. As he had not only the name but also the 'chivalrous ardour' of his Chauhān prototype, Tārā Bāī, with her father's consent, agreed to be his consort on his solemnly affirming that "he would restore to them Thodā, or he was no true Rājput." The leader of the Muslim occupants of Thodā was slain by the lance of Pṛithwīrāj and an arrow thrown by his "Amazonian bride." During the panic which followed it, they came out of the crowd with their party defying all opposition courageously. The invaders were completely routed, and Thodā was recovered for Tārā Bāī's father. There can be no doubt that Tārā Bāī displayed wonderful bravery and unflinching determination worthy of one who is inspired by genuine love for her country. When unfortunately Pṛithwīrāj was poisoned to death by a relation, she embraced the mortal remains of her husband and sought the "regions of the sun" by throwing herself on the funeral pyre. The ashes of the devoted couple "repose in a lonely gorge" opposite the temple of Māma Devī where the road turns towards Mārwār.

Rānī Karṇāvatī: Rānī Karṇāvatī of Mewār, mother of Vikramjit, son and successor of Mahārānā Saṅga, took interest in the political affairs of that State and tried to counteract the evils of maladministration, during the inefficient rule of her son. On the siege of Chitor, by the army of Sultān Bāhādur Shāh of Gujarāt (1534-5), she appealed to the Rājput sense of patriotism and made strenuous efforts to organize an opposition against the invaders. It is said that she also sought Humāyūn's help against Bāhādur Shāh but to no effect. When Chitor was sacked by the invaders in 1535, hundreds of Rājput women, under the leadership of Karṇāvatī, burnt themselves in *jauhar*.[7]

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[6] *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 344; Vol. 2, pp. 782-4.

Rānī Durgāvatī: Rānī Durgāvatī of the kingdom of Karāh Kaṭaṅga or Goṇḍwānā (roughly corresponding to the northern part of Madhya Pradesh) is another Indian lady who was inspired by a sense of genuine loyalty to the interests of her country. She was the daughter of the Chandella chief of Mahobā. Endowed with loveliness and grace, fine accomplishments, unflinching determination and self-less heroism, she not only repulsed an attack on the kingdom of Goṇḍwānā by Bāz Bāhādur of Mālwa[8] but also made a gallant defence against the onrush of Mughal imperialism on it. Immune from external control, this kingdom, then extending for three hundred miles in length and one hundred miles in breadth and with about seventy thousand well inhabited towns and villages,[9] was abounding in wealth. In pursuance of his policy of effecting all-round conquests, Akbar directed in A.D. 1564, Āsaf Khān I, governor of Kara and the eastern provinces, to conquer this kingdom. The reigning king of this area, Bīr Nārāyaṇ, was a minor, but his mother Durgāvatī was governing it with skill and courage. As Abul Fazl tells us, "she neglected no point of courage or capacity, and did great things by dint of her farseeing abilities. She had great contests with Bāz Bahādūr and the Miāns, and was always victorious. She had 20,000 good cavalry with her in her battles, and one thousand famous elephants. The treasures of the Rajahs of that country fell into her hands. She was a good shot with gun and arrow, and continually went a-hunting and shot animals of the chase with her gun. It was her custom that whenever she heard that a tiger had made his appearance she did not drink water till she had shot him."[10]

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[7] Erskine, *Baber and Humayun*, Vol. 2, p. 48.

[8] Blochmann, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. 1, pp. 367, 429.

[9] *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* (Lowe's Trans.), Vol. 2, p. 65.

On the advance of Āsaf Khān I towards Goṇḍwānā, Durgāvatī at once resolved to oppose the imperial army. In reply to the counsel of caution on the part of one of her officers, she observed: "'Twas better to die with glory than to live with ignominy. If the just king were here in person, it would have been proper for her to wait upon him. What did that fellow (Āsaf Khān) know of her rank? It was altogether best that she should die bravely."[11] Putting on her armour and mounted on an elephant, with her bow and quiver lying by her side and with a burnished lance in her hand, the Rānī herself led the troops. "The love of national independence and the example of the queen inspired every breast with courage."[12] Her army inflicted two successive defeats on the Mughal invaders. She wanted to complete their rout by attacking them again during the night, to which, however, she could not secure the consent of the majority of her men.

When the fighting was resumed the next day, her son Bīr Nārāyaṇ was seriously wounded. At this most of her followers deserted the field, and she had left with her only three hundred men. But the intrepid lady, mounted on an elephant, fought with the utmost bravery at a place situated between Garh and Maṇḍala (in the Jubbulpore district), until she was disabled by two arrow-shots. One of her faithful officers wanted to carry her from the field to a place of safety. But she rejected this proposal and exclaimed: "Today is a day in which I am overcome in battle, God forbid that I be also overcome in name and honour, and that I fall into the hands of the enemy; act like a faithful servant, and dispose of me by this sharp dagger."[13] In the true spirit of one having a Rājput descent, Rānī Durgāvatī preferred death to disgrace and stabbed herself. Thus "her end was as noble and devoted as her life had been useful"[14] for her country during the fifteen or sixteen years of her regency.

Sleeman, who had varied experience of this area during his administrative work there for several years, observes in his famous book entitled *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*:[15] "Her tomb is still to be seen where she fell, in a narrow defile between the hills; and a pair of large rounded stones which stand near are, according to popular belief, her royal drums turned into stone, which, in the dead of night, are still heard resounding through the woods and calling the spirits of her warriors from their thousand graves around her. The travellers who pass this solitary spot respectfully place upon the tomb the prettiest specimen they can find of the crystals which abound in the neighbourhood; and with so much of kindly feeling had the history of Durgawati inspired me that I could not resist the temptation of adding one to the number when I visited her tomb some sixteen years ago." So the memory of this noble lady has been justly cherished by posterity with feelings of admiration.

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[10] *Akbarnamah*, Vol. 2, pp. 326-7.

[11] *Ibid.* p. 328.

[12] *Calcutta Review*, April, 1869.

[13] *Akbarnamah*, Vol. 2, p. 330.

[14] *Central Provinces Gazetteer*, p. 283.

Dhātrī Pānnā: Rājput annals also record a unique example of self-sacrifice and devotion to duty on the part of Pānnā, nurse of Udai Singh, the posthumous child of Mahārānā Saṅga. After the death of Mahārānā Saṅga,[16] the throne of Mewār was occupied successively by two of his sons, Rānā Ratan Singh and Rānā Vikramjit (Vikramāditya). Vikramjit was murdered by his cousin Banbīr Singh,[17] who also wanted to remove another 'obstacle to his ambition' by doing away with Udai Singh. Already informed of this foul design by a barber, Pānnā managed to send the child out of the fort through him in a fruit-basket covered with leaves.[18] When Banbīr entered into her room to execute his vile motive and inquired of her about Udai, the faithful nurse pointed to the cradle where her own son was asleep. Banbīr murdered this child.

Pānnā, however, "having consecrated with her tears the ashes of her child," hastened to take care of what she had been able to preserve, and joined the faithful barber, who was waiting with the child some miles west of Chitor. After being refused shelter for the boy at some places, Pānnā went to Kumbhalmer and persuaded its governor Āsā Sāh, who belonged to the mercantile community of the Jainas, to take him under his care. To avoid suspicion in the minds of others, Pānnā soon left that place, and the boy was declared to be the nephew of Āsā Sāh. He remained in this condition for a few years till his identity was recognized by the nobles of Mewār, who installed him on his ancestral throne, and allowed the usurper Banbīr to go to the Deccan (1541-2).[19]

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[15] P. 231. The manuscript of this book was completed in 1839, but it was published in 1844.

[16] In 1530, according to some (V. A. Smith, *Akbar*, p. 83; 'A Brief History of the Gujarat Sultanate' in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1917-28). Dr. S. K. Banerjee puts the date as 1528: *Humayun Padshah*, Vol. 1, p. 83.

[17] S. K. Banerjee, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 129.

[18] Tod, *op. cit.* Vol. 1, pp. 367-8.

2. RELIGIOUS DEVOTEES

In spite of the clashes and conflicts in the realm of politics in India during the medieval age, it was in certain respects a creative epoch in the spheres of religion, thought and culture. One highly significant feature in the history of Indian civilization during this period was the rise of liberal reform movements under saintly preachers like Vallabhāchārya, Rāmānand, Chaitanya, Nāmadev, Kabīr and Nānak, all of whom were exponents of the *bhakti* (devotion) cult. Their preachings were characterized by an emphasis on the fundamental equality of all religions and unity of the Godhead. Love of fellow-beings and unflinching faith in God were, according to them, the true means of human salvation. With a view to transmitting their message to the masses, these reformers used the spoken language in their respective areas, which gave a great stimulus to the growth of the vernacular literatures of India, and facilitated the composition during their lifetime of a few works of outstanding literary importance.

Lalla: It is indeed striking that some Indian women of this period made important contributions towards the enrichment of thought and literature. One of them was Lalla (Lal Ded), the prophetess of Kāshmīr, whose date has been approximately fixed at the end of the fourteenth century.[20] She has been rightly described as "a predecessor of the Medieval Reformers of India,—Rāmānand, Kabīr and the others,—of the fifteenth and later centuries."[21] After a very diligent search, Sir George Grierson, with the assistance of a few learned pandits, made a collection of several verses embodying the essential principles of her teaching. By collating some other manuscripts including Sanskrit translations, he prepared, in collaboration with Dr. L. D. Barnett, an edition of the teachings of Lalla under the title of *Lalla-vākyāni,* which was published by the Royal Asiatic Society, London, in 1920. The printed verses give us a clear idea of her significant role and marvellous influence on her contemporaries in Kāshmīr. From long ago Kāshmīr had been an important centre of Shaivism.[22] Lalla adopted a famous Kāshmīrī Shaiva saint as her spiritual guide, and herself became an ardent devotee of Shaivism. She was also a *yoginī,* a mendicant ascetic, who wandered about preaching the *yogic* doctrines as the best means of ultimate absorption into the Supreme. She taught the absolute dependence of men on the will of the Almighty:

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[19] *Ibid.* pp. 367, 371.
[20] Sir Richard Carnac Temple, *The Word of Lalla, the Prophetess,* Introduction, p. 4.
[21] *Ibid.* p. 1.

"Be his sin misfortune, be it guilt;
Be the guerdon ashes, be it flowers,
O Bhagwān, Thou blessest whom Thou wilt.
O Bhagwān, how wondrous are Thy powers!"

Her attitude in general was not, however, that of a bigot, but universal. She wandered far and wide and preached even eclectic doctrines. She zealously enforced the wisdom of being "all things to all men," the idea that was inherent in the thoughts of most of the Hindu philosophic teachers, including the medieval Indian reformers. She also seems to have been influenced by contemporary Sūfī philosophy in Kāshmīr, which was akin in certain features to Hindu Upanișhadic idealism, through her association with Sayyid Ali Hamdānī and some other Muhammadan saints. The true saint, according to her, was "the servant of all mankind through his humility and loving-kindness."[23] She did not believe in the efficacy of external observances, ritualism or idol worship. She insisted on the performance of duty for duty's sake:

"Whatsoever thing I do of toil,
Burdens of completion on me lie;
Yet unto another falls the spoil
And gains he the fruit thereof, not I.

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[22] J. C. Chatterji, *Kashmir Shaivism* (Srinagar, 1924).
[23] Temple, *op. cit.* p. 165.

Yet if I toil with no thought of self,
All my works before the Self I lay:
Setting faith and duty before pelf,
Well for me shall be the onward way."[24]

Lalla's verses, "more gnomic than lyric,"[25] form a bright specimen of Indian literature, inspired by lofty religious thoughts, and in this respect she can well rank with some other women thinkers and poetesses of medieval India, such as Āṇḍāḷ, the Tamil Vaishṇavite poetess, Muktābāī and Janābāī of Mahārāshṭra and the celebrated Mīrā Bāī.

Mīrā Bāī: Mīrā Bāī was one of the foremost exponents of the *bhakti* cult and an inspired poetess. She sang in Vraja-bhāṣhā, or Vraja-bhāṣhā mixed with Rājasthānī, in praise of Shrī Kṛishṇa (Giridhara Gopāla), her lord and sovereign deity for whom and whom only she developed in her heart of hearts the most intense love and devotion. In one of her verses she said:

"Mīrā's lord is the all-wise Girdhar; she is bound to his service."[26] Soaring above the temptations of a royal household, and by overcoming the importunities or persecutions of relations who wanted her to be worldly, she retained an unflinching faith in God all through her mundane existence.

She mixed freely in the company of holy men, not deterred in the least by the unmerited criticisms for it. Thus she sang:

"Now none else but Him can I claim as my own.
I forsook my father and my mother and all those that were dear to me.
In the company of the Sādhus I sacrificed my world and my modesty.
I rushed to meet a saint when one appeared, and wept when the worldly crossed my path.
With tears I nourished the everlasting creeper of love.
In my search I met the deliverers—
The Saint and the Holy Name.

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[24] *Ibid.* p. 204.
[25] Nicol Macnicol, *The Making of Modern India*, p. 166.
[26] Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Vol. 6, p. 347.

Thenceforward the Name within and the Saint overhead
have lighted my path.
To the Lord, the servant Mīrā has consigned herself.
What cares she for the rumours that be current all round!"

In another hymn she expressed: "Mīrā for the sake of the lord Girdhar would endure the obloquy of the world."[27]

Mīrā occupies indeed a sacred place in the history of Indian thought and culture for her deep and passionate religious devotion, as also for her poetry in which her genius was well revealed, and which was never bereft of beauty in the true sense of the term. Her odes and hymns are so rich, sweet and inspiring, not because of any high rhetoric or dexterity of language, but because they are characterized by a tenderness and simplicity of feeling as genuine outpourings of a heart completely dedicated to God.

Much legend has gathered round the name of Mīrā, and there is a good deal of controversy among writers regarding her date and connection with the Mewār ruling family. According to Tod, she was the queen of Rānā Kumbha of Mewār, to whom she was married in 1413.[28] She has been described as an authoress of the *Rāg-Govind*, as also of a commentary on the *Gīta-Govinda* of Jayadeva. Of the two Kṛishṇa temples in Mewār, the erection of one is attributed to her and that of the other to Rānā Kumbha. Most of the modern writers consider Tod's view to be incorrect, and hold that she was the daughter of Rānā Ratan Singh of Mertā (twenty miles west of Ajmer and forty miles east of Jodhpur), fourth son of Rāo Dudā. She was born either towards the end of the fifteenth century or in the early years of the sixteenth century, and was married to Bhojrāj, son of Rānā Saṅga, about 1516 A.D.[29] She died about 1546 A.D. at Dwārakā (Saurāṣhṭra), where she had repaired after spending some years at Mathurā and Vṛindāvana in the company of saints and pious men. The story about the exchange of correspondence between Tulsidās and Mīrā is baseless; so also is another account which describes the visit of Akbar to Mīrā in the company of Tānsen.[30]

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[27] Macauliffe, *op. cit.* Vol. 6, p. 345.

[28] Tod, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 337, f.n. 3.

[29] Macauliffe, *op. cit.* Vol. 6, p. 343. The place of her birth was Kurki according to some (Grierson, Thakur Gopal Singh Rathor) and Chokri according to others (Munshi Devi Prasad and Shri Ramchandra Shukla).

Other Devotees: Some other women religious devotees also flourished during the period under review. None of them was so prominent as Mīrā, though each was liberal in her outlook and tried to serve God in her own way. One of them, a contemporary of Kabīr, was a milkmaid named Kṣhemā or Kṣhemashrī. Kabīr himself discussed some religious topics with her to his satisfaction. He had some women disciples, one of them being Gaṅgā Bāī. Kamālī, his own daughter according to some, was also a pious devotee. Rāmānand, too, had some women disciples. One of them was Sītā, wife of one of his male disciples, Pīpā.[31] Mention should also be made of Nānī Bāī and Mātā Bāī, the two daughters of the famous liberal religious thinker Dādū (A.D. 1603-60).[32] Both of them were initiated by their father into pious thoughts and remained lifelong maids as religious devotees. Sahajo Bāī and Dayā Bāī, two relations of Charan Dās, founder of the Charan Dāsī sect (mid-18th century), became his ardent disciples,[33] and each was also an authoress of two religious books. The works of Sahajo Bāī were *Sahaj-prakāsh* and *Solah-tattwanirṇay*,[34] and those of Dayā Bāī were *Dayābodh* and *Vinaymālikā*.[35]

3. Women Distinguished in Art and Literature

In Mithilā, which was an important centre of culture from remote antiquity, and where Vidyāpati produced, during the medieval period, his immortal lyrics which create a thrill of inspiration in human minds, there flourished three prominent women who evinced much interest for the cause of learning. One of them was Lakhimā or Lachhimā Devī I, wife of Mahārāja Shiva Siṁha of the Oinwār family of Mithilā. Vidyāpati mentions her name frequently in his *Padāvalīs*[36] (songs). She was fond of Sanskrit literature, and herself composed several verses and songs in that language. Under the orders of Dhīramatī, a queen of Narasiṁhadeva, Vidyāpati wrote the *Dāna-vākyāvalī*.[37] Lachhimā Devī II, wife of Chandra Siṁha, son of Narasiṁhadeva, also deserves mention as a patroness of learning. At her suggestion, Mishru Mishra wrote his two works, entitled *Vivāda-chandra* and *Padārtha-chandra*.[38]

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[30] Macauliffe, *op. cit.* Vol. 6, pp. 350-1; *Mīrā Māḍhurī* by Brajratna Das, pp. 71, 74.

[31] Macauliffe, *op. cit.* Vol. 6, pp. 113-4; Wilson, *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, Vol. 1, p. 58.

[32] Kshitimohan Sen, *Bhāratīya Madhyayuge Sādhanār Dhārā*, pp. 78, 110; Wilson *op. cit.* Vol. 1, p. 58; for a different date of Dādū (born 1[illegible]4 and died 1603) vide Tarachand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p. 182. According to Wilson, he flourished about the year 1600.

[33] Tarachand, *op. cit.* p. 203.

[34] Wilson, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 180.

[35] Kshitimohan Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 109-10.

Some Indian women took interest also in the fine art of music. In his work entitled *Rāgataraṅgiṇī*,[39] Pandit Lochana Kavi has quoted a song composed by Chandrakalā Devī, daughter-in-law of Vidyāpati. Mṛiganayanā, queen of Rājā Mān Singh of Gwālior (1486-1516)[40] possessed a special taste for the *saṅkīrṇa rāgas* or mixed modes of Indian music of which her husband was very fond. Four specimens of her compositions known as *Gujarī, Bābul Gujarī, Māl Gujarī* and *Maṅgal Gujarī* have survived for posterity.[41]

Another contemporary Hindu lady, Rūpamatī of Mālwa, was gifted with poetic powers and a fine taste for music. Her career was romantic. She was devoted to her royal lover, Bāz Bāhādur of Mālwa, who also was very fond of music. On the invasion of Mālwa by the Mughal general Ādam Khān and the flight of Bāz Bāhādur from his kingdom, Rūpamatī committed suicide[42] to save herself from dishonour at the hands of the infatuated general. The songs of Rūpamatī, composed in the Mālwa dialect of Hindi, though not recorded in written compositions, were preserved by professional singers and musicians.

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[36] *J.A.S.B.*, 1915, p. 419. Vidyāpati's literary works belong to the period from 1395 to 1440 A.D. (*Ibid.* p. 392).

[37] *Ibid.* p. 419.

[38] *Ibid.* p. 404.

[39] Published at the Dārbhāṅgā Rāj Press in Samvat 1999. This work was composed in Shaka 1624 at the time of Mahārāja Narapati Ṭhākura, younger brother of Mahārāja Mahīnātha Ṭhākura of the Khaṇḍabala family.

[40] Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey Report*, Vol. 2, p. 386.

[41] *Ibid.* p. 388.

[42] Dorn, *History of the Afghāns* (English Translation), Part 1, p. 178.

CHAPTER XVII

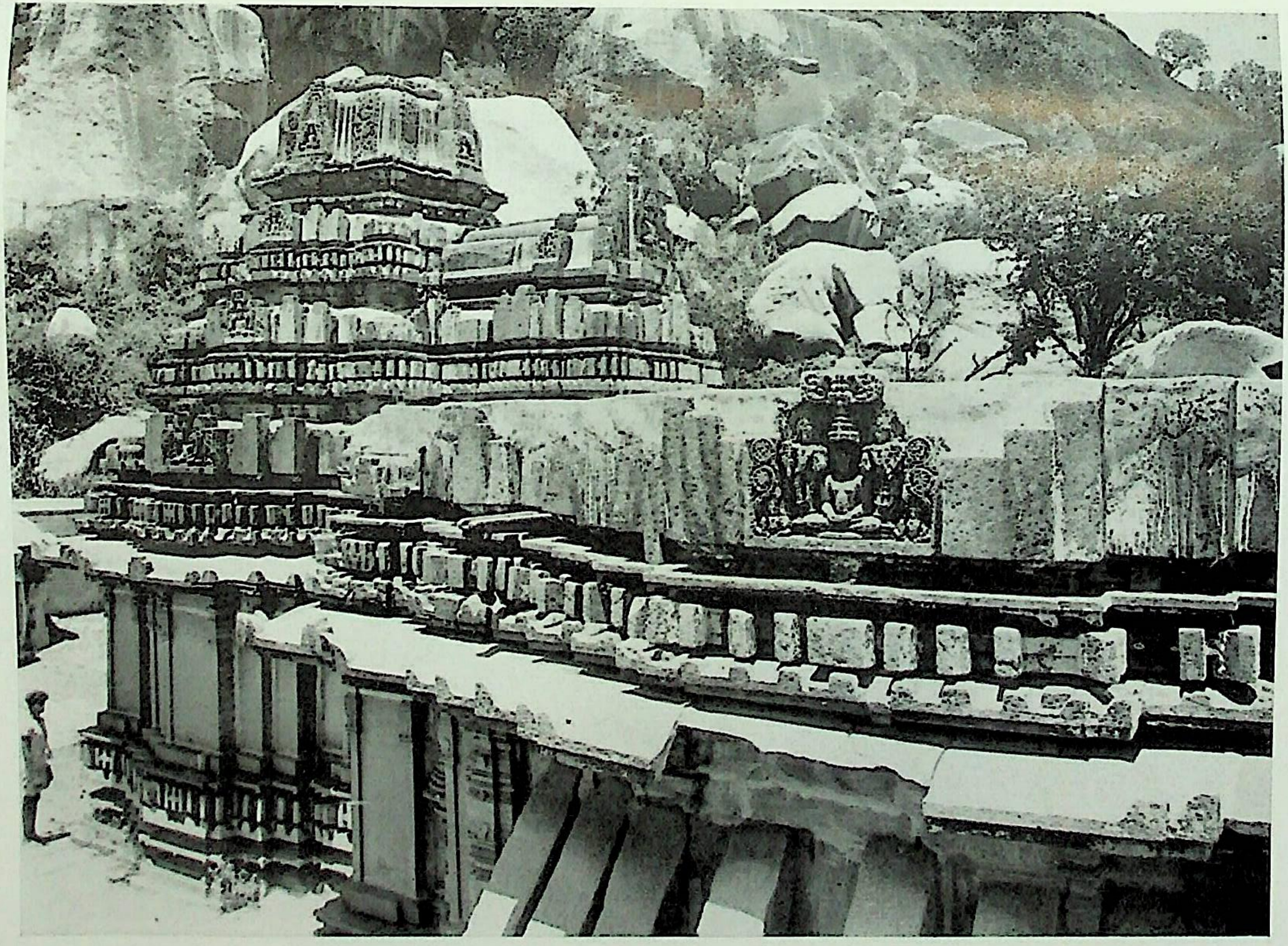
GREAT HINDU WOMEN IN SOUTH INDIA

(*c.* 1301 to 1800 A.D.)

1. Poetesses

Art and literature in south India attained fullness and freedom of expression in the Vijayanagara epoch. The Rāyas and, following them, the chiefs of the different States patronized learning. Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannaḍa flourished, and were enriched by the composition of high class *prabandhas*, *padas* and dramas. A folk variety of the drama, called the *yakṣhagaṇa* came into prominence; it was acted in open-air theatres, and, though primarily meant for the entertainment of the masses, was witnessed by kings and nobles.

Gaṅgādevī: Gaṅgādevī was the queen of Kumāra Kampaṇa or Kampaṇa II, who conquered Shambuvarāya in A.D. 1361 and the Sultān of Madurā in A.D. 1371, and brought thereby the whole of the Tamil country as far south as Setubandha Rāmeshwaram under the Vijayanagara empire. We have no information about her parentage and early career. The only facts known about her are that she was a highly educated and talented woman and married Kumāra Kampaṇa of Vijayanagara, whom she accompanied to the south during his expeditions against Shambuvarāya and the Sultān of Madurā. She wrote a fine Sanskrit epic called the *Madhurā-vijayam* describing the heroic deeds of her husband. In the eulogy on poets at the beginning of her *Madhurā-vijayam*, she gives considerable prominence to the Sanskrit poets of the Telugu country, such as Agastya, Gaṅgādhara and Vishwanātha, the last of whom was the preceptor from whom she learnt all she knew. Special interest is attached to the poet Tikkaya, whose poetry 'resembles the moonlight, drunk with avidity by thirsty poets like *chakora* birds.' This Tikkaya is none other than the famous Tikkanasomayājī, the author of fifteen out of the eighteen *parvans* (books) of the Telugu *Mahābhārata*. It is obvious that Gaṅgādevī, the pupil



AKKANA BASTI

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of Vishwanātha and an admirer of Tikkana-somayājī's poetry, was a Telugu princess.

The *Madhurā-vijayam* is a historical epic, which describes Kampaṇa's victories in the Tamil country. Its value as a source-book of early Vijayanagara history cannot easily be over-estimated. As a poetess, Gaṅgādevī takes a high rank ; she is perhaps the greatest of women writers of south India who chose Sanskrit as the vehicle of poetic expression. The appraisement of her work by editors may be quoted here with advantage. "The work is in the form of a classical Kāvya, conforming to the rules laid down in the treatises on poetics and containing the usual lengthy description of the seasons, the twilight, the rising of the moon and other necessary topics. The authoress writes in the *Vaidarbhī* style, and her thoughts, which flow with ease and simplicity, are clothed in diction at once beautiful and charming. Her similes are grand and drawn direct from nature, with none of the conventional pedantry of grammar or rhetoric which so largely spoils the productions of later-day poets. . . . She has adopted certain scenes and descriptions which are favourite with Kālidāsa, but they are transformed at the mint of her imagination and invested with new significance."

Molla: Unlike Gaṅgādevī, Molla was not a lady of royal rank. She was of humble origin, being the daughter of Keshava Sheṭṭi, a potter of Gopavaram (modern Paḍugupāḍu), a few miles to the north of Nellore on the left bank of the Peṇṇār river. Molla is the earliest and also perhaps the greatest of the Telugu poetesses. Though her date is not definitely known, it is not at all unlikely that she flourished in the palmy days of Emperor Kṛiṣhṇadevarāya or a little earlier. In the eulogy on poets of her *Rāmāyaṇam* she refers to the famous poet Shrīnātha, who lived in the closing years of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century. Nothing is known of the personal history of Molla except that she wrote her famous poem, the *Rāmāyaṇam*.

Molla's *Rāmāyaṇam*, though small in size, is a poem of considerable poetic excellence and literary merit. Until recently, it used to be studied as a text-book in village schools, where boys were taught to learn it by heart. Molla is a vigorous writer. Though simple, her style is dignified, and her verse easy-flowing and forcible.

She is at her best in the Sundara-kāṇḍam ; the brief pen-picture of Rāvaṇa, Hanūmat and Sītā are unsurpassed in the whole range of Telugu literature. It is not known whether Molla wrote any other work ; but her *Rāmāyaṇam* is enough to secure for her an abiding place in the galaxy of the immortals who enriched the Telugu language and literature.

Oduva Tirumalāmbā: In the court of King Achyutarāya of Vijayanagara was a poetess of great merit, who was possibly employed as a reader in the royal court—whose duty was perhaps the reading of poetical and other compositions to the ladies of the royal family as well as to the royal court. The name of this poetess was Tirumalāmbā, and she was popularly known as Oduva (reader) Tirumalāmbā. Evidently she was a genius, since she was an excellent musician and grammarian, possessing in addition a good command of rhetoric and diction. She was a scholar of the Indian epics, poetry, drama and philosophy. She had other accomplishments also ; she was a linguist and could write in many scripts. In addition to all these excellent qualities, she must have possessed great beauty, for King Achyutarāya became so enamoured of her that he elevated her to the position of queen (*rāja-mahishī*). We learn most of these details from the epilogue to one of her works entitled *Varadāmbikā-pariṇaya-champū,* a romance in Sanskrit celebrating the wedding of King Achyutarāya and his senior queen Varadāmbikā. It is learnt from epigraphic and other sources that Varadāmbikā was the principal queen (*paṭṭa-mahishī*) of Achyutarāya, and it is interesting to note that a junior queen should have celebrated in song the marriage of her rival without showing any jealousy. Possibly she might have been a good-natured woman and wrote the prose-verse (*champū*) romance only out of regard and affection for Varadāmbikā. We also learn from the epilogue to the *Champū* that she was a patroness of learned priests, scholars and poets, and that she made liberal gifts and endowments to temples and other religious institutions. This poem also describes the birth of Prince Veṅkaṭādri, the first-born of Varadāmbikā.

There are two types of opinion regarding the literary merits of *Varadāmbikā-pariṇaya*. One is highly laudatory, and the other is rather lukewarm. But it cannot be denied that the work shows that

Tirumalāmbā was a highly educated woman, who wrote for the cultured.

She composed two Sanskrit verses on the occasion of one of Achyutarāya's *dāna* (gift) ceremonies called *Ānandanidhi* (mine of joy) and had them engraved in many places. She composed another verse commemorating the king's gift of *swarṇameru* (a heap of gold) to Brāhmaṇas at Hampi in *Shaka* 1455 (A.D. 1533). It is also surmised that the three verses recording the king's *tulābhāra* (body-weight) of pearls at Kāñchīpuram in the same year were composed by her.

Honnamma: Literary talents are not confined to the members of the Brāhmaṇa or the Kṣhatriya class. A Shūdra woman became much reputed as the writer of a socio-poetical composition in Kannaḍa. Her name was Honnamma, and she probably belonged to Yeḷandūr (Mysore State). She was working in the palace of the Mysore king Chikka Devarāja. She was evidently the favourite maidservant of the chief queen Devājammaṇṇi. She was educated at the instance of the queen by a well known scholar proficient in the Vedas and the Vedanta, who was also the author of a drama called *Mitravinda-Govinda*. This teacher, Aḷashiṅgārāchārya, was evidently so pleased with the ability of his pupil that he called her the goddess of charming literature (*sarasa-sāhityada varadevatā*). This praise of a pupil by a teacher impressed the king so much that he told his queen to get a literary piece written by Honnamma. The queen must have communicated the king's wishes to Honnamma, who accordingly wrote an important book called *Hadibadeya Dharma*, which deals with the duties of a chaste woman. This book has become so popular that verses from it are sung even today. It is of value also from the point of view of history, since it gives the genealogy of the Mysore kings up to the seventeenth century.

Cheluvāmbā: Among the later poetesses of the Karnāṭaka country, we may mention Cheluvāmbā, the queen of Doḍḍa Kṛiṣhṇa-rāja, the king of Mysore. She is reputed as the author of a long poem called *Varanandī-kalyāṇa*. She has also written lullaby songs on the greatness of the deity Veṅkaṭāchala of Tirupati and on the goddess Alamelumaṅga. She has in addition written a prose commentary on the *Tulākāverī-māhātmya*. She states that she wrote the delightful *Varanandī-kalyāṇa* at the command of her husband. Her style is very mellifluous. She flourished about 1725 A.D.

Heḷavanakaṭṭe Giriyamma: None of the poetesses who have been mentioned so far was a Brāhmaṇa. This does not mean that there were no poetesses belonging to this class. We have the excellent example of a devotee of the Lord Raṅganātha, from a place called Heḷavanakaṭṭe, who was a Brāhmaṇa poetess. She was named Giriyamma. She is remembered for her devotional poetry, and some of her well known poems deal with such popular themes as the marriage of Sītā, the stories of Chandrahāsa and Uddālaka. Besides these, she composed a number of songs which are quite popular even today. A point of interest regarding these songs is that even the *rāgas* (musical modes) are specified by her. We can recognize her compositions by the words "Heḷavanakaṭṭe Raṅgayya," that occur towards the end of the pieces. All her works are in Kannaḍa. Tradition says that she lived in the village of Komāranahaḷḷi near Harihara (in Mysore State) about two hundred years ago.

Tarigoṇḍa Veṅgamāmbā: Another lady who acquired fame as a poetess was Tarigoṇḍa Veṅgamāmbā. She was perhaps a native of Tarigoṇḍa in the Vayalpāḍ taluk of the Chittoor district, as indicated by the dedication of all her works to the deity Narasiṁha enshrined in the village. She was the daughter of a Brāhmaṇa named Kṛishṇayya. Widowed early in life, she found solace in religion and philosophy (especially, yoga), which furnished themes for her literary compositions. She was probably born in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

Veṅgamāmbā was a more prolific authoress than most of the women writers who had preceded her. Three of her metrical works in Telugu—the *Bhāgavata*, the *Rājayoga-sāra* and the *Veṅkaṭāchala-māhātmya*—have come down to us. Though not equal in literary craftsmanship to Molla or Muddupaḷani, her poetry is not without charm. Her language is sweet, and her descriptions, especially of erotic subjects, are free from the excesses which mar the compositions of many others. The popularity of Veṅgamāmbā rests more upon *Rājayoga-sāra* than on her other works. It serves as an introduction to the study of the Yoga philosophy, and is read with avidity by many who devote their lives to the cultivation of the spirit.

The Nāyaka queens of Tanjore were cultured women, and some of them have made distinct contributions to Sanskrit and Telugu literatures. The poems and dramas composed during this period mark the growth of a vigorous southern school of Telugu literature. It certainly speaks highly of these ladies that they were able to distinguish themselves in a region which has for centuries been the hub of south Indian culture, and during this particular period when it produced men of eminence, some of whom were polyhistors.

Two consorts of Raghunātha Nāyaka (1600-30)—Madhuravāṇī and Rāmabhadrāmbā—both pupils of Kāḷayya, and one queen of Vijayarāghava (1633-73)—Raṅgajamma—deserve mention.

Madhuravāṇī: Her attainments are enumerated in the introduction to her *Rāmāyaṇa.* She was proficient in grammar and prosody, and an adept in completing *samasyās* (incomplete cryptic verses) and in *ashṭāvadhāna* (attending to eight things at a time) and *shatāvadhāna* (attending to a hundred things at a time). She was also a gifted musician, and for her skill in playing on the *vīṇā* (lute) her royal lover called her *madhura-vāṇī* (of sweet tone). Vijayarāghava, the next ruler, introduced her as a character in his *yakshagana*—the *Raghunāthābhyudayam,* where she is spoken of as an *āshukavitā-vāṇī* (one who can compose verses offhand).

Her *Rāmāyaṇa* in fourteen cantos purports to be a Sanskrit rendering of Raghunātha Nāyaka's poem in Telugu, which is now probably lost. The translation is no mean work of art; the style is simple, graceful and dignified, reminiscent of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁsha,* which she appears to have imitated successfully in many places.

Rāmabhadrāmbā: Rāmabhadrāmbā wrote a historical poem in twelve cantos called the *Raghunāthābhyudayam,* describing the political and military events that happened during the reign of Raghunātha Nāyaka. Apart from its literary merit, the poem is of very great importance as a source of Vijayanagara history. It is a contemporary account of the political revolution which hastened the disintegration and downfall of the empire of the Rāyas. As a poetess she is in no way inferior to Madhuravāṇī. Having chosen a historical theme for her poem, she could not give full play to her poetic fancy and imagination. That was not due to her want of ability, but to the limitation of the subject she had chosen. She has a great power of narration, and her descriptions of battle scenes are lovely. Her style is spontaneous, and her verse flows smoothly like an unobstructed stream. Owing to her being an adept in the rhetoric, her imagery is varied and original. Two cantos of the poem describe the accomplishments of the ladies of the Tanjore court, who could compose with facility verses in eight languages. Some of them could even expound the Vaisheṣhika philosophy and grammar. Rāmabhadrāmbā herself was a *shatalekhinī,* one who could compose a hundred verses in eight languages within a *ghaṭika* (about twenty-four minutes). *Vijaya-vilāsam* is another poem that is attributed to her.

Raṅgajamma: A daughter of Pasupuleti Veṅkaṭādri and Maṅgamāmbā, Raṅgajamma was a consort of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka (1633-73). She also was a *shatalekhinī,* and her forte was erotic poetry, though she was skilled in *rājanīti* (politics). Her two Telugu poems are the *Mannārudāsa-vilāsam*[1] and *Uṣhā-pariṇayam*. She also wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa-sāram* and the *Bhārata-sāram* and a *yakṣhagaṇa* play. *Uṣhā-pariṇayam* is perhaps the greatest of her works and deserves a place among the great *prabandhas* in the Telugu language. In composing her *yakṣhagaṇa,* she followed the literary technique of Vijayarāghava. Her style is simple and homely.

Vijayarāghava, who was attracted by her charms and talents, spent most of his time in her company, and in appreciation of her versatility bathed her in a shower of gold (*kanakābhiṣheka*).

Muddupaḷani: The Bhonsle rulers of Tanjore continued the literary and cultural traditions of the Nāyakas, whom they supplanted. One of the greatest masters of the southern school of Telugu, which flourished in the Tamil country, was Muddupaḷani, a daughter of a courtesan in the harem of Pratāpa Siṁha (1739-63) of Tanjore. Muddupaḷani must therefore have lived about the middle of the eighteenth century. Like most of the courtesans in the court of Tanjore, she was highly educated and was proficient in Sanskrit and Telugu ; her command over the latter was admirable.

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[1] Mannārudāsa (Servant of Mannār) was a surname of Vijayarāghava. Mannār or Rājamannār was the popular name of Shrī Rājagopāla, enshrined in the temple of Mannārguḍi.

She was an expert in dancing and music, and her skill on the *vīṇā* won the admiration of her contemporaries. Muddupaḷani was, above all, a poetess of great literary merit, and her works are still popular.

She is the authoress of two works, the *Rādhikā-sāntwana* or *Iḷādevīya* and the *Aṣhṭapadi.* The former, an erotic poem describing the loves of Rādhikā and Kṛiṣhṇa, is a work of uncommon literary excellence. Her diction and imagery are fine, her descriptions charming; and the style is simple, homely and graceful. The *Aṣhṭapadi* is a Telugu rendering of Jayadeva's work of the same name. Competent music critics are of opinion that the translation is worthy of the original, which gives us an insight into the great musical talents of the authoress.

2. Queens

Chennammāji: When the mighty Vijayanagara empire disintegrated, of the many viceroys who became independent rulers, the Nāyakas of Keḷadi became prominent. Of the later chiefs of this dynasty, two became rather well known in the second half of the seventeenth century—the brothers Bhadrappa Nāyaka and Somashekhara Nāyaka. It was at this time that the latter's wife Chennammāji attained eminence. It may be surmised that the two brothers were ruling jointly round about A.D. 1661, and that Chennammāji also held authority along with her husband. Evidently she was a woman of great administrative ability, since her husband allowed her to hold the reins of government, not only when he was ruling along with his brother, but even later on when he was himself the sole monarch. Towards the later part of his life, Chennammāji carried on the administration of the kingdom, though in the name of her husband.

After his death in A.D. 1677, she assumed full command and ruled wisely and well for twenty-five years. The principal sources of information about her are a Kannaḍa literary work entitled *Keḷadi-nṛipa-vijaya*, and an encyclopaedic work in Sanskrit called *Shivatattwa-ratnākara*, the author of which is Hiriya-Basappa Nāyaka, the adopted son of Chennammāji. From these sources, as well as from epigraphs, we learn that this lady distinguished herself by an act of heroism of no mean order. She had the courage to offer shelter to Rājārām, a son of Shivājī, who had escaped from Rāigarh and was hotly pursued by the armies of Auraṅgzeb. When the Mughal forces had the temerity to enter her State to capture Rājārām, she routed them so totally that she came to be regarded as a very great heroine. From Bednūr Rājārām was helped to escape to the strong fortress of Jiñji. Chennamma was thus able to save her little State in the north-west of modern Mysore from Mughal occupation. Auraṅgzeb was so struck with her heroism that he honoured her by sending her valuable gifts. Another act of her military prowess was the defeat of the Mysore army led by Daḷavāy Timmappa, when she took his son captive.

She founded in memory of her husband a town called Somashekharapura on the banks of the Tuṅgabhadrā, and presented it to Brāhmaṇas who were well versed in the Vedas. This act is an indication of her generosity and respect for learning. We also learn (from the sources already mentioned) that she was deeply religious and benevolent. She established permanent charities in her own name at a number of places such as Banāras, Rāmeshwaram, Tirupati and Shrīshaila. In addition to these she built *maṭhas* (monasteries) for the itinerant Liṅgāyat monks (Jaṅgamas) and patronized those of the Advaita (monistic) and Dwaita (dualistic) sects also. It is said that she administered her kingdom so well that people said that there was no other ruler who could match Chennammāji in nobility of character, prowess, charity and devoutness.

Umayamma: When Āditya Varma, king of Travancore, died, there was no one to succeed him except Umayamma, the Rānī of Āttiṅgal, and her six minor sons. The Āttiṅgal family, though connected with the Travancore family, was at that time an independent house owning extensive territories not subject to the control of Travancore. The real power in Travancore was then in the hands of a confederacy of Nāyar nobles belonging to eight different villages. They burnt the royal palace and later poisoned the king. The nobles waited on Umayamma at Āttiṅgal and assured her of their loyalty, which was but a cloak for the treachery that they were contemplating. Their hired ruffians drowned five of the princes in a tank. The Rānī with her surviving son left Puthencoṭṭa and went to Neḍumaṅgāḍ. Her flight was the signal for the establishment of a reign of terror in the capital. Taking advantage of the chaotic conditions of the State, a Mughal adventurer invaded Travancore, put the nobles to flight and established his rule in parts of south Travancore.

Now was the time for Umayamma to act. With the help of Kerala Varma, a prince of the northern Koṭṭayam family, she overpowered the adventurer in a battle at Tiruvaṭṭār and slew him. The refractory nobles and the assembly of priests in charge of the Shrī Padmanābha temple were forced to obedience. The Rānī assumed control of affairs at Trivandrum, with Kerala Varma as her principal counsellor and commander of the troops. She secured the various treasuries and took steps to prevent defalcation. Unfortunately Kerala Varma died soon after ; it is suspected that he was assassinated.

When her son Ravi Varma was installed on his coming of age, she left him a kingdom which enjoyed complete peace. Since she had become old and had no daughters to provide an heir to the throne, she adopted two princes—Uṇṇi Kerala Varma and Rāma Varma—and two princesses from the Kolattunāḍ house and made them heirs. She ruled from A.D. 1678-84. Van Rheed, a Dutch governor of Ceylon of the time, has left on record his estimate of Rānī Umayamma as one "who not only rules Āttiṅgal but Travancore itself."

Maṅgamma: A lampoon by a contemporary writer, Chinna Venkaṇṇa, throws some light on Maṅgamma's life. According to his account, she was a daughter of Tupākula Liṅgama Nāyaka of Chandragiri and a courtesan of Tiruvellore (Chingleput district) called Kanakā. Beautiful and accomplished, young Maṅgamma migrated probably in search of a career to the court of Vijayarāghava of Tanjore, where talented women had opportunities of rising to prominence. Vijayarāghava is said to have intended to take her into his harem, but she left Tanjore for some reason or other and married Chokkanātha Nāyaka of Madurā, whose heart she captured by her blandishments. The account, perhaps, a distorted one, may contain a kernel of truth.

Maṅgamma survived her husband and her son Raṅgakṛishṇa Muttuvīrappa Nāyaka, and after the demise of the latter in 1689 ruled the kingdom till 1707 as the regent during the minority of her grandson Vijayaraṅga Chokkanātha Nāyaka.

The regency of Maṅgamma was a critical period in the history of the Nāyaka kingdom of Madurā, which was threatened on the one side by the Mughal forces of Auraṅgzeb that were operating in south India, and on the other by the rulers of Mysore, Tanjore, Rāmnāḍ and Travancore. Maṅgamma shrewdly decided that the only way of survival was to acknowledge the supremacy of the Mughal emperor. She agreed to pay him an annual tribute, and secured the goodwill of his officers and generals by suitable presents and bribes.

Towards her other enemies she adopted a policy of firmness, and waged war upon them, on the whole successfully. Occasionally she had to buy off some of them with bribes, but that was a temporary expedient. Later, when she felt she was strong enough, she overpowered the enemy and exacted compensation. She had for her counsellor Narasappiah, great in strategy and administration and in private life a skilful player on the *vīṇā* (lute).

Maṅgamma's name is almost a household word in the south Tamil country. There are still in existence numerous avenues and choultries (*dharmashālās*) built by her as well as the lofty piles like those that now remain of the Nāyaka palaces within the fort area of Trichinopoly. All these are monuments to the greatness of her rule. Her benefactions to temples and gifts of *agrahārams* to learned Brāhmaṇas were numerous, but she was equally liberal in her endowments to Christian churches and Muslim *dargāhs*. The *dargāh* of Bābā Nattar Auliyā at Trichinopoly was specially favoured and received grants of villages. Manucci has paid a handsome tribute to her benevolence and large-hearted tolerance.

There is an interesting account of a social enactment in her reign. The Saurāṣhṭra weavers of Madurā claimed the privilege of observing some ceremonies peculiar to Brāhmaṇas. Maṅgamma first opposed the claim, but later sanctioned it.

There are conflicting reports about the end of her reign. According to one account, power was forcibly wrested from her hands and transferred to her grandson, on his coming of age, and the queen perished in prison. Whatever may be the truth, Maṅgamma's place in history as a capable, enlightened and beneficent ruler is unchallengeable.

CHAPTER XVIII

GREAT HINDU WOMEN IN MAHĀRĀṢHṬRA

1. Women Saints and Poetesses

Mahadambā: The earliest poetess known so far in the history of Marāṭhī literature is Mahadambā, also called Mahaḍāisā or Rūpāī. She lived in the thirteenth century, when the Yādava kings reigned in Devagiri (Daulatābād).

Vāmanāchārya, a brahmin, lived in the town of Purī on the southern bank of the river Godāvarī. His wife Mahadāisā was a very intelligent woman, well versed in scriptures. Vāmanāchārya and his wife acted as priests to the royal family. Once some pandits from other provinces came to Devagiri for discussion, when Mahadāisā refuted their arguments so successfully that king Mahādeo was very much pleased and made her a grant of five villages.

The poetess Mahadāisā is said to be her grand-daughter. She was married, but lost her husband when very young, and came back to stay with her father's family. She had from the beginning a religious bent of mind. Chakradhara, the founder of the Mahānubhava cult, had come to Mahārāṣhṭra and moved about, popularizing the philosophy of his cult. She became his disciple and followed him. She would ask him various questions both as regards his life and the philosophy he was preaching. These personal stories are included in the books *Itihāsa* and *Līlā-charitra,* and it is from her that we have some valuable information about her guru and his times.

When Chakradhara went on a pilgrimage to Badrī-Kedār, she was attending upon Govind Prabhu, the guru of Chakradhara, and after the latter's death, she spent the remaining days of her life in the company of his disciple Nāgadeo, who was her uncle.

She was a staunch follower of the Mahānubhava faith, in which it is forbidden to worship any other deity than Kṛiṣhṇa. Once she went to her brother Āpalo's house. She found some other deity worshipped there and returned forthwith.

In her last illness an abscess developed on one of her feet, and it was thought necessary to open it. She said, "My guru does not approve of it, O Nāgadeo. Moreover, I am nearing my end. I would rather pass away than disobey my guru." After her death Nāgadeo rightly remarked that "the old woman was the guardian of the faith."

The piece of poetry for which she is well known is *Dhavaḷe* (auspicious song to be sung in marriage), and this is how it came to be composed. Govind Prabhu once thought of getting married at a very advanced age. The match was arranged. As the celebrations continued, he asked Mahadāisā to sing a song of her own. "What can I sing?" she exclaimed, "I cannot compose!" "Well," said her guru, "begin with the words, 'Placing the feet of Chakradhara (Vishṇu) on my head.'" As soon as she heard this cue, she added in verse: "I will compose in praise of Govinda," and thereafter the words flowed spontaneously. She described the festivities at the marriage of Shrī Krishṇa and Rukmiṇī and, without committing anything to writing, completed the song then and there. This was the first part of the *Dhavaḷe* songs. The second part was completed at a later date. She composed another poem on Rukmiṇī's marriage, the lines of which begin with the *mātṛikās,* or letters of the Marāṭhī alphabet, in order.

Thus to Mahadāisā goes the distinction of being the first poetess of Marāṭhī.

Muktābāī: "Nivṛitti, Jñānadev, Sopān, Muktābāī, Ekanāth, Nāmadev and Tukārām—those who sing these names with joy attain the auspicious abode (of God)." This is a couplet daily recited by the devotees of the Lord Viṭṭhal of Paṇḍharpur in their *bhajanas* or devotional songs, in which Muktābāī (A.D. 1279-97) has got the unique honour of being referred to as one of the pioneers of Vārakarī cult. The story of her life is bound up with that of Jñānadev; no separate life of hers is known. She was the youngest child of Viṭṭhalpant Kulkarṇī of Āpegāon, on the banks of the river Godāvarī, near Paiṭhaṇ, who married a daughter of one Siddhopant Kulkarṇī of Āḷandī. The girl was named Rakhamābāī after marriage. For a long time the couple had no issue, and Viṭṭhalpant, who had already developed an indifference to worldly life and a craving for the search of the Infinite, left home and went to Banāras. There he met Saint Rāmānand, to whom he disclosed his heart's desire. It is customary to become an anchorite with the permission of one's wife, but when Viṭṭhalpant told him that he had no wife, Rāmānand initiated him into the order of anchorites and named him Chaitanyānanda.

Rakhamābāī spent her days at Āḷandī, praying to God that some day her husband might return. After some twelve years Rāmānand happened to go to Āḷandī while on his way to Rāmeshwar. There he saw a woman worshipping a sacred tree, and as he went along that road, she came forward and bowed to him. "May you be the mother of eight boys," he said by way of blessing, at which she smiled sadly. Thereupon Rāmānand inquired into her life-story and felt sure that Chaitanyānanda must be her husband. So he returned to Banāras, taking Rakhamābāī and Siddhopant with him. There he sent for Chaitanyānanda and after due inquiry asked him to return immediately to Āḷandī and resume the householder's life. Viṭṭhalpant obeyed.

In the years that followed, four children were born to them. The first three were sons and were named Nivṛitti, Jñānadev and Sopān, and the youngest child was a daughter and was named Mukti. Viṭṭhalpant had taught his children all that was necessary for a brahmin to learn, but the people of Āḷandī were not prepared to accept the family into their fold. They treated them as outcasts. "A monk could not be a householder again," they said, "and as the religious codes did not sanction the initiation of an anchorite's son, the boys must go without that." This meant that they were to be outcasts for life. When he asked for some penance, Viṭṭhalpant was told that none except the ending of one's life was prescribed in the scriptures. At this Viṭṭhalpant, who was already tormented by the social boycott, got thoroughly disgusted with the world, went to Allahabad and threw himself into the Ganges at Prayāg. His wife, too, followed him, and the four children were left orphans to face the consequences in an unsympathetic world. Muktābāī was then not more than six years old. The two elder brothers went round the town begging for alms, while the youngest one took care of Muktābāī. Jñānadev, the second brother, tried once more to persuade the brahmins to invest them with the sacred thread, but it was of no avail. The boys were told to go to Paiṭhaṇ, which was a seat of learning and a stronghold of religion in those days. There a conference was held to discuss the matter, but the decision was negative, and the children lost all hope of ever being readmitted into their caste.

Born of pure parents highly devoted to God, and brought up by a learned father full of the true spirit of renunciation, these gifted children had an education which was superior to that of many brahmins. Driven to exasperation by the mockery of a cruel society, Jñānadev, the most intellectual of the group, assumed a challenging attitude. To the joke of brahmins, "You need not bother about purification, since your very names suggest greatness," he rebutted, "Everyone is great, since the Ātman (Self) pervades everything. Men, beasts and trees are all great." Defeated in argument, they wanted him to perform a miracle, which it is said, was wrought. This changed the attitude of the brahmins towards the boys to one of admiration in place of scorn and ridicule. Many anecdotes about their possessing supernatural powers grew current. The pandits of Paiṭhaṇ wrote a letter to the brahmins of Āḷandī, saying that the boys were far superior to other brahmins, and that there was no need of any penance or initiation for them. Now the family had some respite.

Jñānadev completed his studies of Vedānta and other philosophies and became a profound scholar. He wrote his famous *Jñāneshwarī*, an exposition of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in the Marāṭhī language. He began to hold discourses on the Purāṇas, visit Paṇḍharpur in the festival season and spend time there in the company of Nāmadev and other saints.

Muktābāī was all along with her brothers during the years of trial, and as times changed, she also received her share of admiration and honour. She was also supposed to possess supernatural powers like her brothers. She was a saint now, and was initiating others into spirituality. Many a legend is current about her ability as a spiritual guide.

One of these says that Jñānadev with his brothers and sister once paid a visit to the shrine of Viṭṭhal at Paṇḍharpur. Saint Nāmadev, who always stayed there, was also sitting near the image of the deity. He thought that he was dearer to Viṭhobā since he was always in His company. Jñānadev and his brothers saluted the

Lord Viṭṭhal as also Nāmadev. Muktābāī, however, who could read Nāmadev's innermost thoughts, saluted the Lord, but refused to bow down before Nāmadev, saying, "Mere staying in the company of God does not make a man worthy of salute. Nāmadev does not deserve any, since he has had no spiritual guide as yet." A discussion arose, and it was decided that Nāmadev should go to Āḷandī, where Gorā Kumbhār, the potter, a well known saint of the time, should say whether Nāmadev was a perfect saint or not.

Accordingly Nāmadev went to Āḷandī, and in the *kīrtana* (devotional group-singing) which was held there, Gorā tested the saints who were assembled with a strip of wood in his hand. But as he drew near Nāmadev, the latter got upset. At this Gorā said that Nāmadev was a *kachchā* (raw) pot and needed a guru to guide him. Then he was sent to Visobā Khechar, a disciple of Jñānadev, but at one time his opponent. Nāmadev went to Visobā and is said to have had a miraculous demonstration from him that there was not a place devoid of God's presence in this world; so it was foolish on his part to consider himself superior to other saints who could not stay at Paṇḍharpur. Now Gorā acknowledged him as a perfect saint. Muktābāī also recognized him as such by bowing down to him.

In another legend she is said to be the spiritual guide of Chāṅgadev Vaṭeshwar, a yogi living on the bank of the river Tāpī. He had his own disciples, but was himself without a guru. By this time the fame of Jñānadev had spread far and wide, and Chāṅgadev wished to make him his guru. When the request was made, Jñānadev bade Muktābāī to be the spiritual guide instead of himself. In many an *abhaṅga* (song) of Chāṅgadev she is referred to as such.

Muktābāī had an aptitude for composing verses. Very few of her *abhaṅgas* have come down to us, and it is difficult to know how many she composed. Her most popular *abhaṅga* is *Tāṭīche Abhaṅga* (The Song of the Door). Once, the story goes, Jñānadev was annoyed with the people and locked up himself in his hut. When Muktābāī knew this, she composed some *abhaṅgas* bringing to the notice of her brother that it does not become a saint to be ruffled over the follies of the world. In one of the verses she says, "An ascetic is pure in mind and forgives the offences of people. If the world is hot as fire owing to exasperation, a sage should with pleasure be cool as water. If people hurt them with weapons of words, saints should treat those remarks as pieces of advice. This universe is a single piece of cloth woven with the one thread of Brahman; so please open the door, O Jñāneshwar."

Many other legends extolling the greatness of Jñānadev, in which Muktābāī also is indirectly concerned, are extant, and it is difficult to sift the proportion of fact from fiction. Still, after making due allowance for fabrication and exaggeration, one is inclined to think that she was a very striking personality possessed of many of the qualities that made her brothers great.

Hers was a brief roselike life. She was struck by lightning and died when she was barely eighteen.

Janābāī: A girl sat weeping on the steps of the temple of Paṇḍharpur. "Why do you weep, child?" asked Dāmāsheṭī, a tailor from a near-by town patting the girl on the back, "It is getting very late, where are your parents?" "I have none," replied the girl and wept all the more bitterly. "Then you will be my child," said Dāmāsheṭī, and bringing her home, handed her over to his wife.

The incident happened some six hundred years ago, when Dāmāsheṭī went to the Viṭhobā temple to have a sight of the deity at the annual festival in Kārttika (October-November). This orphan girl, who was called Janī, came to be known afterwards as one of the most revered poet-saints.

She is, however, a person of whose life-story we know very little but talk much. She is a poetess whose *abhaṅgas* are very popular and are recited in the *kīrtanas* and daily prayers up to this day, and much is made of the supposed incidents in her life.

Mahīpati, the writer of *Bhakta-vijaya,* supplies us with a few facts. According to him, Janī's father was Dāmā and her mother, Karuṇḍ. They were low-caste people and came from Gaṅgākheḍa, a village near by, to visit Viṭhobā at Paṇḍharpur. Janī accompanied them, but after seeing the deity she resolved to stay on in the town. Dāmāsheṭī lived in a town named Narasī-brāhmaṇī in the district of Parbhaṇī (now in the State of Hyderābād), and he came to Paṇḍharpur to have the *darshana* (sight) of Viṭhobā on the Kārttikī *ekādashī* day (eleventh day after the new moon), as was the tradition in the Vārakarī family. He had the good fortune of having as his son Nāmadev, who later became one of those venerable poet-saints who are remembered in people's daily *bhajana* (devotional music).

Janī was eventually accepted into Dāmāsheṭī's family as a servant-girl. She grew up in the company of young Nāmadev who was devoted to Viṭhobā. In course of time Nāmadev was married and had two children. After the death of his father, Nāmadev took up his calling as a tailor, but his real interest lay in the composition of *abhaṅgas,* which he would sing in his *kīrtanas* at the temple door of Viṭhobā. He had resolved to compose a fabulous number of *abhaṅgas.* The task being too heavy for one person, he decided to take the help of his family members, each of whom was allotted a certain number of verses to compose. Janī too was allotted a big number. So there are *abhaṅgas* in the name of Nāma's mother, wife, sons and daughters. Janī's composition, however, excelled all others, for she imagined herself to be in the constant company of the Lord Viṭhobā.

Whenever Janī was doing any household work, she thought that her Lord was keeping her company. She would wake up early in the morning and begin to grind corn for the family, and stories got current that the Lord Viṭhobā came to her help. One day Nāmadev's mother heard someone talking in the hut of Janī, and as she peeped inside, she saw another woman helping Janī. On being questioned, she told her name as Viṭhābāī. Now the mother understood that it must be Viṭhobā, and felt sorry for being suspicious about Janī. Another legend says that many a time Viṭhobā came and partook of the meal with Nāmadev. One day Janī had gone to the farm to make dung cakes. "I cannot relish my food without Janī," said the deity. So Janī was sent for, and then all partook of the food in great joy.

Whatever may be the truth behind these legends, it seems certain that she had come to be greatly adored by people in her lifetime, and that adoration still continues. One does not know how many *abhaṅgas* she actually composed. Much of her composition seems to have been lost; but some three hundred *abhaṅgas* are associated with her name to this day. Many of them seem to have been tampered with; there are interpolations also; so it is difficult to ascertain which formed her original composition. But there is no doubt of the fact that her *abhaṅgas* are popular, and have found a place in the daily *bhajanas* of the Vārakarīs.

Kānhopātrā: In the town of Maṅgalveḍā, near Paṇḍharpur, there lived a dancing girl, Shyāmā by name. To her was born a daughter, who was named Kānhopātrā. The girl grew extremely beautiful. Her mother taught her to sing and dance and hoped to make ample money out of her performances. But Kānhopātrā developed a dislike for such money-making and said that she would accept that person alone as a suitor who would be equal to her in beauty, and so refused many.

One day a group of Vārakarīs happened to pass along a street of Maṅgalveḍā on their way to Paṇḍharpur. They were singing songs in praise of Viṭṭhal. "Of whom are you singing?" Kānhopātrā inquired. "We are singing the praises of our Lord Viṭṭhal," they said, "He is kind and generous and the best of all persons." "Will He accept me if I go to Him?" she asked. "Certainly," they replied, and the girl followed them to Paṇḍharpur. She entered the temple, and when she saw the image of Viṭṭhal, she was so much filled with admiration for Him that she decided to dedicate her life to His service. She stayed there and sang and danced every day before the deity.

By this time the fame of her beauty had spread far and wide. The king of Bedar, who came to know of it, wished that she should adorn his harem, and sent sepoys to fetch her with instructions to use force, if needed. One day as she was singing in the temple as usual, the sepoys from Bedar reached there. Everyone knew that protest would be of no avail.

"I will accompany you," she quietly said to them, "but before we start, let me have a sight of my Lord." The sepoys agreed and waited outside the temple, while she entered the innermost chamber. Placing her head at the feet of the deity, she said sobbing, "It is for You to decide, my Lord, whether a devotee of Yours should fall a prey to the evil desires of a tyrant king. It is a challenge to Your greatness." The sepoys, who waited and waited, got tired, and forcing their way in, were startled to find her dead—so overpowered by emotion she had been.

The king, when he was informed of it, was wild with rage, but was prevailed upon by the priests to visit the temple. When he saw the image of Viṭṭhal, he was so much enchanted with the sight that he came to believe the incident and himself became a devotee of the Lord.

Kānhopātrā lived in the fifteenth century. She composed devotional songs (*abhaṅgas*); one does not know how many, for only a few have come down to us in oral tradition. In one of these songs she says:

"O Viṭhābāī, I come to You as my last resort.
For I am a wretch, poor and sinful;
I have no caste and know no etiquette;
Though I am not worthy of You, meet me, O Viṭhābāī.
Let me rest at Your feet; for I, Kānhopātrā, am Your slave."

Bahiṇābāī: Of the Mahārāṣhṭra saint-poetesses, Bahiṇī (1628-1700) is unique in having left a record of her own story. She was born in 1628 A.D. at a town named Deogāon, to the west of Verūla, a place well known for its carved temples. Her father was Audeo Kulkarṇī, a village scribe, and her mother was named Jānakībāī. For many years they had no child, and for this they practised austerities. One day Audeo saw in his dream a Brāhmaṇa who told him that he would be blessed with a daughter and two sons. Soon after Bahiṇī was born. When she was five years of age, her parents married her to a learned brahmin named Ratnākar Pāṭhak, a widower aged thirty, who was a distant relative of the family. Bahiṇī afterwards had two brothers.

Soon after, owing to a family feud the parents had to leave the place for good. At the request of Audeo, his son-in-law also joined them. At dead of night they started in search of a place to settle in, and finally chose Kolhāpur, where they got shelter in the veranda of a learned brahmin named Bahirāmbhaṭ. Of all the places they had visited, Paṇḍharpur seems to have left a lasting impression on Bahiṇī's mind. She was filled with devotion at the sight of Viṭhobā, and forgot her worries on hearing the recitation of Tukārām's *abhaṅgas*. Soon Bahirāmbhaṭ received the gift of a cow and a calf, which, in response to a dream, he donated to Audeo. Bahiṇī fed and milked the cow, and the calf got so much attached to her that it followed her everywhere.

At this time Jayarām-swāmī, a well known performer of *kīrtana* (devotional musical discourse) had come to Kolhāpur, and his performances had grown very popular. Bahiṇī's parents attended them with her, and the calf too followed. One day some people, thinking the calf to be an intruder, drove it out. At this the calf began to bleat, and Bahiṇī also could not help sobbing. The incident drew the attention of Jayarām-swāmī, who called the calf back and caressed both it and the girl. This was reported to Bahiṇī's husband, who, disliking the attention of Jayarām-swāmī to his wife, severely punished her.

When Jayarām-swāmī came to know of this, he said to him, "You don't know what a good fortune you have in your wife. She is a *yoga-bhrashṭā* (a former yogi under a temporary lapse). She is extremely religious and dutiful. But you are her husband, and what more can I say to you?"

Bahiṇī lay unconscious for three days. When she regained consciousness, she saw her parents and her husband sitting by her side. But she was too weak to move. She felt that she had seen the image of Viṭṭhal before her ; Tukārām also had appeared to her and told her to be steady. She recovered in due course, but was completely changed: she spent her time in the recital of Tukārām's *abhaṅgas*.

She rose in the esteem of people, who began to come for a sight of her. Again her husband felt jealous and decided to leave her and retire to a forest. Bahiṇī felt very sad at this and resolved to give up her life in case that would happen. Strangely enough, on the eve of his departure, he was suddenly taken ill and grew restless. Bahiṇī patiently nursed him. Thinking that it was perhaps due to his abusing the saints, he repented and felt better. Then the whole family moved to Dehū, where they regularly listened to the *kīrtana* of Tukārām.

Here also they had difficulties. Some people did not like the idea of a brahmin couple calling themselves disciples of Tukārām, who was of a low caste. But this time Bahiṇī's husband stood by her, and she came to be respected by people all the more.

She had a liking for yoga, though she was not formally initiated into it. One day when her husband had gone to Poona, she, with the permission of her mother, went and sat in the *owarī* or pilgrim quarters. As she herself has said: "I meditated there continuously for three days. In the end I felt as if Tukārām had come before me, put his hand on my head and asked me to compose. I do not know whether it was a dream or a reality. But I felt so happy and elated! I got up and went to the river to bathe. As soon as I came out of the river, words flowed from my mouth, I do not know how."

She had a daughter and a son born to her, and it seems that she lived at Dehū as long as Tukārām was there. She does not tell us anything of her subsequent life. In the verses she composed as a last message to her son, she speaks about her previous births, and it seems she knew beforehand the time of her death.

Veṇābāī: Veṇābāī, the disciple of Rāmadās, was a contemporary of Bahiṇābāī and, like her, spent the first years of her life at Kolhāpur. It was there that both of them had to face the trial that changed the whole course of their lives. It is interesting to see that the life-period of Veṇābāī (1627-78) almost coincides with that of Shivājī (1630-80).

Veṇābāī was born in a brahmin family named Deshpāṇḍe. She was a child widow. In both her father's and mother's family the worship of Rāma was traditional. She was taught to recite the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* since she was a child. The families had also an admiration for the cult of *Rāmadās,* which had recently sprung up in Mahārāṣhṭra. So she grew up in an atmosphere of devotion to Rāma, and her widowhood must have helped to increase her religious bent.

When she was twenty, she stayed with her mother-in-law at Miraj. One day, as she sat reading the *Bhāgavata,* Saint Rāmadās visited the house in his daily round for alms. He was interested to see a young woman reading the *Bhāgavata.* "Do you follow what you read, my child?" he inquired. "No sir, but I am trying to," was her reply. Then she asked him certain questions about *jīva* (soul) and Shiva. Rāmadās put them and their answers into a verse and gave the piece to her to learn by heart.

After some time she went to her father's house at Kolhāpur.

Rāmadās was there, and his *kīrtana* was drawing crowds. Veṇābāī attended them and was so much charmed with him that scandal spread. Her parents tried to dissuade her from her path, but in vain. In their anxiety to save the good name of the family, they are said to have poisoned her. While she lay suffering, Rāmadās suddenly appeared and touched her body with a stick. Immediately she felt all right, only her skin turned dark.

This was a turning point in Veṇābāī's life. She left her people and followed Rāmadās as his disciple. She served her guru, and educated herself by listening to *kīrtana* and the Purāṇas for six years. The germ of poetry that was dormant in her now flowered, and she began to compose. Seeing her ability, her guru admitted her to his order, allowed her to perform *kīrtana* and sent her to Miraj to lay the foundation of a monastery for the spread of his cult.

Once Gāgābhaṭ, a learned brahmin from Banāras, is said to have gone to meet Rāmadās at Paṇḍharpur with a view to holding discussions with him on philosophy. Then Rāmadās sent for Veṇābāī and asked her to take the *Dāsabodha* and explain the monistic doctrine taught therein. On listening to her able discourse, Gāgābhaṭ returned satisfied about the greatness of her teacher.

After the coronation of King Shivājī, there was a gathering of the followers of Rāmadās at Sajjangaḍ under the auspices of the saint himself. All the disciples, including Shivājī, had to give demonstrations in *kīrtana,* and Veṇābāī also gave one. All her poetry is in praise of Rāma, and the best known piece is *Sītā-swayaṁvara* (Sītā's Choice of a Husband). Of the smaller compositions, *Kaula* (A Charter of People's Happiness) is widely recited.

Thus, after a strenuous service of more than twenty years at Miraj, she went on her annual visit to Sajjangaḍ. Her health, which was never up to the mark since the poisoning incident, was by now completely shattered. One day Rāmadās asked her to prepare for dinner certain dainty dishes, in which she was an expert, and then to stand up and perform *kīrtana.* At the end of the *kīrtana,* as she laid herself at the feet of her master, her soul left the frail body and was united with the Supreme Being.

Akkābāī: When people speak of women disciples of Rāmadās, the name of Akkābāī is invariably mentioned with that of Veṇābāī.

She was the daughter of Rudrājīpant Deshpāṇḍe of Karhāḍ. Chimaṇābāī was her original name, though she was popularly called Akkā, which is a term applied to the eldest sister in a family. She was a child widow, and, like Veṇābāī, seems to have had religious bent of mind from early childhood. Rāmadās, towards the beginning of his career, while touring round the districts of Sātārā and Kolhāpur, visited Karhāḍ, and there Akkābāī happened to listen to his discourses. She was so much filled with admiration for the cause he was espousing that she decided to dedicate her life to the spread of the cult of Rāma worship. But Rāmadās wanted to test her tenacity first. So he asked her to stand neck-deep in the cold water of a river for three days reciting a certain *mantra* (sacred formula), which she patiently did. Being thus satisfied with the sincerity of her devotion, Rāmadās asked her to join his band of workers and put her in charge of the kitchen department at Chāphaḷ.

Her abilities gradually unfolded there, and in the years to come she proved herself to be one of the ablest and most trusted disciples of Rāmadās. She went round and collected alms, and became the head of the monasteries at Chāphaḷ and Parḷī. She was also one of those few who were privileged to look to the daily needs of the saint and to be present at his death-bed. She lived long after the demise of Rāmadās.

The years that followed were full of unrest. The struggle between the Marāṭhās and Auraṅgzeb was at its worst. Sambhājī was put to a cruel end, and Rājārām had to flee to Jinjī for safety. The monasteries at Chāphaḷ and Parḷī were also threatened, and the idols of Rāma at both these places had to be shifted and hidden. It is no small compliment to Akkābāī's ability that she managed these monasteries well for more than thirty years during those times of trouble.

After the death of Auraṅgzeb, Shāhū returned to the Deccan and took the reins of his kingdom. He visited Parḷī in person and requested Akkābāī and her colleagues to help him as they had helped his grandfather Shivājī. Akkābāī honoured him as their chief and promised him every kind of help. At the same time she requested him to make permanent arrangements for the management of these monasteries, since she had grown old and could no longer stand the strain of the responsibility. Shāhū accordingly sent for

Gaṅgādharpant, the grandson of the elder brother of Rāmadās, and made the post a hereditary one. She spent the remaining ten years of her life at Parḷī and died in the year 1721 A.D.

2. Women in Politics and Administration

Jijābāī: Jijābāī (1594-1674) was the daughter of Lakhūjī Jādhavrāo, a descendant of the Yādava kings of Devagiri, and a powerful Sardār at the court of Nizām Shāh of Ahmednagar. In A.D. 1605 she was married to Shāhājī, son of Mālojī, who received from Nizām Shāh the *jāgīr* (land grant) of Poona and Supā and the fortresses of Shivnerī and Chākaṇ.

Shāhājī and Jijābāī spent some happy years, but it was not long before a situation developed which found Shāhājī and his father-in-law Jādhavrāo in opposite camps. Jādhavrāo crossed over to the side of the Mughals of Delhi, but Shāhājī remained a staunch supporter of Nizām Shāh, and rose to be his chief counsellor and lieutenant. Thus Jijābāī had to choose between her loyalty to her father and that to her husband. She threw in her lot with her husband. Her strong sense of duty which set aside all other sentiments, her courage and fortitude that made light of adversity and her self-respect which set a great value on freedom were the highlights of Jijābāī's character, which she later passed on to her son Shivājī, the founder of the Marāṭhā empire.

When Shāhājī, after one of his reverses in battle, was fleeing before the armies of Jādhavrāo, Jijābāī was expecting a baby and could not keep pace. Shāhājī, trusting in the goodness of a father's heart, left her behind, confident that no harm would come to her at the hands of her father, although Jādhavrāo had become his own enemy.

But Jijābāī, when asked by her father to go to his place, refused and chose instead to stay at the fort of Shivnerī. She had by now observed the plight of the land of the Marāṭhās being overrun again and again by the armies of the Mughal emperor of Delhi and the Muslim kings of the south, and prayed earnestly to Shivāī, the guardian-deity of Fort Shivnerī, that she might be blessed with a son who would put a stop to these unsatisfactory conditions and found a kingdom of the Marāṭhās in Mahārāṣhṭra which would be free from the tyranny of the Mughals. Her earnest prayers were granted, and to her was born a son whom she named Shivājī after the name of the goddess Shivāī.

History has repeatedly shown that great men had even greater mothers. Shivājī too owed his greatness to the inspiration of his mother. His strong character was built under Jijābāī's guidance and care. Not only did she fire young Shivājī's imagination with the idea of a free Mahārāṣhṭra but she also imbued him with great ideas of tolerance, justice and fair play. It was not a power-mad monster that Jijābāī hoped to make of her son, but a real great king, who would have at heart the common weal and progress of his subjects. All her energies were devoted to this end.

Shāhājī, who had meanwhile become the chief minister of 'Ālī 'Ādil Shāh of Bijāpur, found that young Shivājī's ideas of throwing off the yoke of the emperor were conflicting with his own duties, and thought it better to send him to Poona to stay with his mother. Here Shivājī learnt the rudiments of administration from his mother, who managed Shāhājī's *jāgīr* of Poona.

When Shivājī met Afzalkhān and killed him at the foot of Fort Pratāpgarh, his mother, who was fully aware of the plans, sat anxiously praying for his safety and when finally he came out successful, joyously bade the poet Ajñāndās to sing of this in a ballad.

When in a game of chess Jijābāī checkmated Shivājī, he asked her to name the price of her win. She characteristically demanded that Fort Koṇḍāṇā, which was only sixteen miles south-west of Poona and stood within their direct view, be captured from the Mughals. For this purpose she sent for Tānājī, a henchman of Shivājī, who held her in as high esteem as her son. Tānājī postponed the marriage ceremony of his son to go on this mission. The fort was won, but Tānājī lost his life.

In 1666, when Shivājī left for Āgrā, we find that Jijābāī was appointed head of the council of regency for the little kingdom of Poona during his absence.

Jijābāī had taught Shivājī to hold all women in great respect, and he instructed his soldiers to honour all women, and rigidly enforced it. It was also at the inspiration of his mother that Shivājī scrupulously followed the policy of religious toleration.

It was the popular belief that when a Hindu was forcibly converted to another religion, he was for ever lost to Hinduism, in spite of his own feelings to the contrary. To combat this pernicious notion, which depleted the ranks of the Hindus, Jijābāī reconverted Bajājī Nimbāḷkar to Hinduism, and to show that a reconvert to Hinduism was of no less status than any other Hindu, she gave in marriage to Bajājī her own grand-daughter Sakhūbāī, the daughter of Shivājī.

She lived till the age of eighty, watched the growth of the Marāṭhā power, and after witnessing the coronation of Shivājī, passed away peacefully in the village of Pāchāḍ at the foot of Fort Rāigarh.

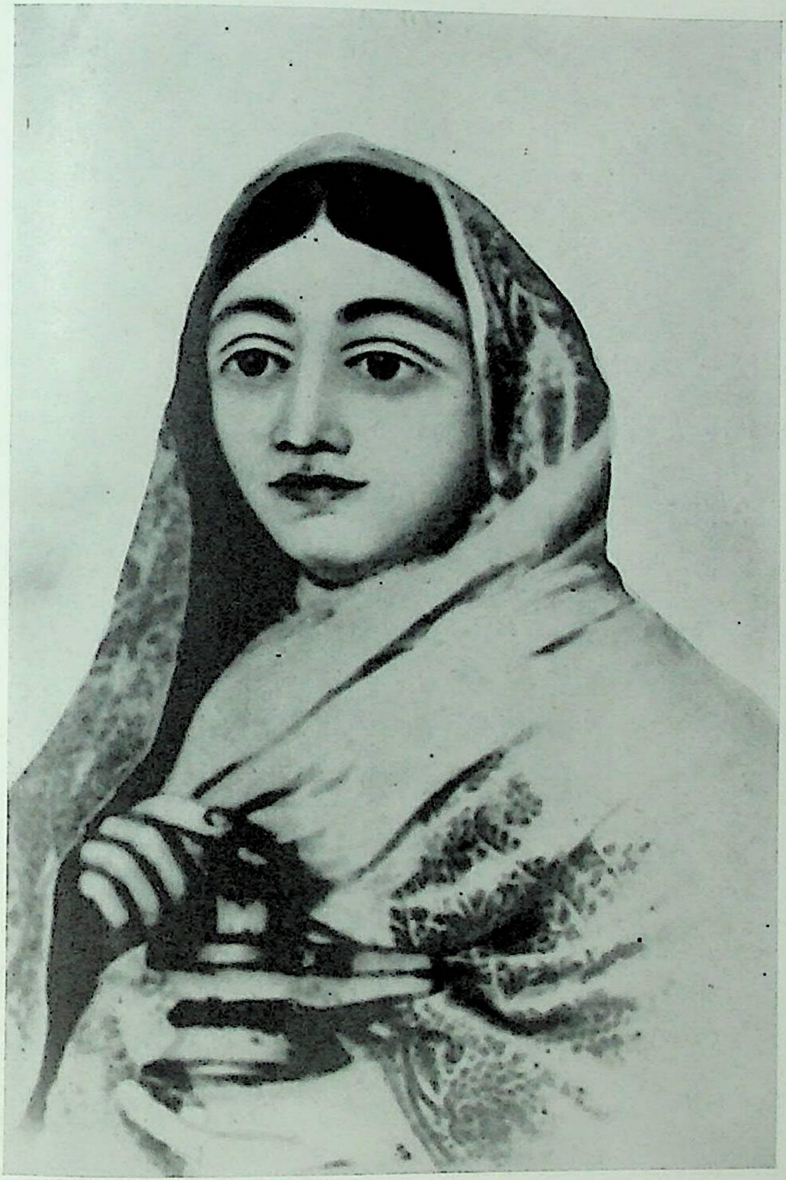
Tārābāī: Tārābāī (1675-1761) was a daughter of Hambīrarāo Mohite and was married to Rājārām, son of Shivājī. She was both able and ambitious, had imbibed the spirit of the times and tried hard to stop the advance of the Mughal armies. According to some Muhammadan writers, she showed better spirit than Rājārām.

Undoubtedly she was a woman of great intelligence and administrative ability, and all, including the Mughal writers, admit that it was due to her opposition that Auraṅgzeb could not found a kingdom in the Deccan during the seven years following the death of Rājārām. She took charge of the armies, arranged them, moved from fortress to fortress and made it impossible for the Mughal armies to stay in the Deccan.

After the death of her husband she tried to secure the succession for her son in place of Shāhū, the son of Sambhājī. This started a civil war, which eventually led to the foundation of a collateral ruling family at Kolhāpur.

Ahalyābāī: "Khaṇḍūjī is living, while Ahalyā is dead. I shall take it that way, child. Don't be a sati and follow your husband even in death. Please listen to me," poor old Malhārarāo was entreating Ahalyābāī (1735-95), his daughter-in-law.

It was in the year 1754. The Peshwā's brother Rāghobā (Raghunāth) besieged the fort of Kumbherī, and Malhārarāo Hoḷkar was there to help him. His son Khaṇḍūjī and daughter-in-law Ahalyābāī were also with him in the camp. One afternoon a cannon ball struck Khaṇḍūjī, and he died. It was a great blow to Malhārarāo, for Khaṇḍūjī was his only son. His daughter-in-law,



AHALYĀBĀĪ

who was barely twenty, was a woman of great courage and decided to be a sati, as was customary in those days. But Malhārarāo persuaded her not to do so, since she was his only hope and solace in this life.

She was the daughter of one Māṇakojī Shinde of Chauṭe, in the district of Auraṅgābād. In the year 1743 the Peshwā's army happened to encamp near that village. Malhārarāo Hoḷkar was also accompanying him with his army. The Peshwā happened to see Ahalyā, the eight-year old child of Māṇakojī and was favourably impressed with her. She could not be called beautiful, but on account of her pleasant looks and behaviour he wished to see her well settled by marriage into some Sardār's family. Malhārarāo, his trusted assistant, was there with his family. His son Khaṇḍūjī was thought to be a fit bridegroom for her. The marriage was settled and was celebrated with great pomp.

To their utter disappointment, however, Khaṇḍūjī turned out to be a very indolent, pleasure-seeking and irresponsible person, and though he never ill-treated his wife, he did not much care for her. Ahalyābāī, on the contrary, grew up into an intelligent and dutiful woman, whom Malhārarāo could entrust with the responsibilities of state affairs. And he coached her in the collection of revenue, writing of dispatches and in the management of the army. Many a time he also took her with him in his campaigns.

Two children—a son named Mālerāo and a daughter called Muktābāī—were born to her, and must have made her forget the disappointments of her married life. But they too were to add to the misery of the last hours of her life.

Once she decided not to follow her husband as a sati, she diverted all her energies to the affairs of the State. She had an inborn religious bent, which grew deeper with strokes of misfortune. She had come to see the futility of worldly happiness and cared more for religion, devoting a good many hours every day to reflection, prayer and scriptural study.

After the death of Malhārarāo, Mālerāo, her son, was nominally made the subahdar. But she was the ruler *de facto,* since Mālerāo was not competent. The Peshwā had known her ability, and even after Mālerāo's death she continued to be in charge of the State, Tukojīrāo, the adopted son, being in charge of the army only. She was a good administratrix and an impartial judge. Conciliation and kindness were her watchword, but she could be stern when occasion required it. In the beginning of her reign, the Chandrāvats, a Rājput clan, rose in revolt against her. Their territory had been transferred by their ruler to Malhārarāo to be annexed to the State of Indore. As soon as the latter died, they tried to get rid of the Hoḷkar's rule. Tukojī Hoḷkar, her general, was away on duty in north India, but she did not wait. She collected whatever forces she could, led it personally and put down the revolt. Similarly, certain Bhil tribes in Sātpurā grew troublesome. She arrested their leader and put him to death. This strong action of hers quelled the restless elements in the State, so much so that they never troubled her again. Anant Fandī, the well known Marāṭhī Shāhīr, was going through the Sātpurā Hills, when the Bhils waylaid him. But when they came to know that he was going to Ahalyābāī, they escorted him safely to her.

She was very unlucky in her son, who proved to be a weak-minded boy. Later he developed madness and eventually succumbed to it. When Rāghobā, the uncle of the ruling Peshwā, saw the State without an heir, he thought of invading it, so that he might get money. But Ahalyābāī, though in grief, did not forget her self-respect. She organized a regiment of women and sent word to Rāghobā: "It seems that you want to meet me in the field. I am prepared. I am but a woman, and it will not add to your glory even if I am defeated. But think of the consequences in case the reverse happens." The message was eloquent enough. Rāghobā changed his mind and informed her that his was a visit of condolence.

Years passed somewhat peacefully. But towards the end of her life she had the mortification of seeing her dear daughter Muktābāī burn herself on the funeral pyre of her husband as a sati. It was too great a shock for her body and mind. She retired to her palace and for three days remained so absorbed in grief that she practically took no food and never uttered a word. She continued to live a rigid life of austerity till she died on 13th August, 1795.

"The success of Ahalya Baee in the internal administration of her domains," in the words of Sir John Malcolm, whose knowledge of Marāṭhā affairs of the time was based on personal investigations, "was altogether wonderful.[1] ... In the most sober view that can be taken of her character, she certainly appears, within her limited sphere, to have been one of the purest and most exemplary rulers that ever existed."[2]

The many good things that Ahalyābāī did remain as monuments to her piety in the form of highways, wells, ghats, rest-houses and temples. The most noteworthy among them are the road from Calcutta to Banāras and the temples of Somanātha in Saurāṣhṭra, of Viṣhṇu at Gayā and of Vishweshwara at Banāras.

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[1] Some records originally kept at Maheshwar, the old capital of the Hoḷkars, and recently brought to light (*Proceedings, Indian Historical Records Commission,* December, 1930) by Sardar Rao Bahadur Kibe, M.A., Deputy Prime Minister, Indore State, "show what a leading part the pious lady Ahalyā Bāi took in the stirring events of the time."

[2] R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta, *An Advanced History of India,* pp. 679-80.

CHAPTER XIX

GREAT HINDU WOMEN IN GUJARĀT AND SAURĀṢHṬRA

1. Three Distinguished Women

Mayaṇallā: Mayaṇallā or Mīnaladevī, as she is popularly known, was the daughter of Jayakeshin, a king of the Kadamba dynasty in Karnāṭaka. She is famous as the mother of Siddharāja Jayasiṁha (1094-1143 A.D.), the great Chāḷukya king of Gujarāt who ruled at Aṇahillavāḍa Pāṭaṇ in north Gujarāt. Siddharāja's father Karṇa I (1064-94 A.D.) died when Siddharāja was a child. During the minority of the latter Mayaṇallā managed the affairs of the State in co-operation with the old ministers and councillors, and was an able adviser to the king even after he assumed full responsibility of government. She is still remembered in Gujarāt as an able and just administrator, as a queen mother who took very great and sympathetic interest in the well-being of the people and also as a builder of remarkable monuments.

Siddharāja Jayasiṁha is the most remembered of all the kings of Gujarāt. He still lives in folk-literature and folk-dramas, and like Vikrama and Bhoja, has almost become a legendary figure. He was a great conqueror and created a vast Gujarāt empire. He was a great builder of monuments and a true patron of learning. It appears that Mayaṇallā took very keen interest in the upbringing of the young sovereign, and made him a memorable ruler. There is no doubt that Siddharāja was inspired by Mayaṇallā in many of his warlike exploits. The fact has been attested by an incident described in the *Prabandha-kosha* (1349 A.D.) of Rājashekhara-sūri.

When Siddharāja returned after conquering Mālwa and the bards began to praise him, he spoke the following verse in dejection: "I wish that no mother would give birth to a son that achieves a great good fortune after her death."

During her regency Mayaṇallā had built two famous lakes, which are to be seen to this day. One is Mīnalasar or Munsar near

Virāmgām, and another is Malāv at Dhavalakka or Dholkā in Ahmedābād. According to a tradition widely current in Gujarāt, there was the house of a courtesan abutting the proposed site of the lake Malāv, and the lake would not be symmetrical unless that house was acquired. Mayaṇallā offered a big sum for the house, but the owner refused to sell it saying, "I shall be famous with your lake." Mayaṇallā did not coerce her, which she could very easily have done. As a result of this there came to be a saying in Gujarātī, "If you want to see justice, go to Dholkā and have a look at the lake Malāv."

A pious act of Mayaṇallā which has historical importance was the remission of the tax on pilgrims going to Somanātha. As is well known, Somanātha was one of the greatest Shaivite places of pilgrimage in medieval India, and thousands of pilgrims from all parts of the country were visiting it. The tax levied on the pilgrims yielded an annual income of seventy-two lakhs, according to the *Prabandha-chintāmaṇi*.

As described in the *Prabandhas*, once Mayaṇallā started on a pilgrimage to Somanātha. When she reached Bāhulod, she saw some Shaiva *sādhus* (holy men) being harassed by the revenue officers of the State, since they could not pay the tax. The *sādhus*, unable to visit the sacred place, were returning with tears in their eyes. Mayaṇallā was so overcome by the incident that she herself turned away. On her way back, she met Siddharāja, her son, who requested her to come to Somanātha. But she replied, "I shall come to the holy shrine and take food only if this tax is remitted." Siddharāja gave his consent, called the revenue officers and passed the necessary orders. Then Mayaṇallā accompanied by him, went to Somanātha.

Mayaṇallā is also referred to in contemporary literature. One Yashashchandra has written a Sanskrit play entitled *Mudrita-kumudachandra-prakaraṇa* depicting a learned dispute in the court of Siddharāja Jayasiṁha between the leaders of the rival sects of Jainism, Shwetāmbaras and Digambaras. The Shwetāmbara leader was Vādi Deva-sūri, and his rival was Kumudachandra. Siddharāja himself presided over the debate. One of the topics of the debate was whether women could attain salvation. According to the Digambaras, women cannot attain salvation, while according to the Shwetāmbaras they can. Deva-sūri averred that those women who have *sattwa* (inner quality of goodness) could attain salvation, and cited the names of chaste women like Sītā from mythology. Among the great contemporary women, the name of Queen-mother Mayaṇallā was also mentioned, according to the above-named book. This reference speaks for the high honour accorded to her by her contemporaries.

Nāikīdevī: Nāikīdevī was the mother of Bāla Mūlarāja or Mūlarāja II, who ruled at Aṇahillavāḍa Pāṭaṇ for two years from 1176-8 A.D. According to the *Prabandha-chintāmaṇi*, Nāikīdevī was a daughter of King Paramardin, who may be identified with King Paramadi or Shivachitta (1147-75 A.D.) of the Kadamba dynasty. Only one historical fact is known regarding the life of Nāikīdevī, but that is remarkable enough to immortalize her name in history. Her son Mūlarāja was a minor, as the adjective *bāla* (child) prefixed to his name suggests. During his reign there was a Muslim invasion in Gujarāt. The Gujarāt chronicles do not mention the name of the invader, but on the basis of historical evidence it may be surmised that he was none other than Muhammad Ghūrī. *Prabandha-chintāmaṇi* says that Nāikīdevī kept her son on her lap, fought with the enemy and defeated him in a mountain pass called Gāḍarāghaṭṭa. This pass has not been identified as yet, but it may be somewhere at the foot of Mt. Ābu, which was the northern defence outpost of Gujarāt. The Muslim chronicles also say that the king of Naharwālā (Aṇahillavāḍa) was a child, that he had a powerful army and many elephants, and that the Muslims were defeated and had to retreat. Of course, the Muslim chronicles have wrongly mentioned the name of the ruler as Bhīmadeva—an error which can easily be explained. Mūlarāja died very shortly after this invasion and was succeeded by Bhīmadeva II, who ruled for not less than sixty-four years.

It is unfortunate that we do not know anything more about the life and work of this brave queen Nāikīdevī.

Anupamā: Vastupāla and Tejaḥpāla (first half of the thirteenth century A.D.) are two famous names in the history of Gujarāt. They were brothers and came from a Jaina family belonging to the Prāgvāṭa (Porvād) community. They were ministers of King Vīradhavala of Dholkā, who was a feudatory of King Bhīmadeva II of Aṇahillavāḍa Pāṭaṇ. Both the brothers were not only shrewd politicians and successful generals, but also great patrons of learning, men of religious devotion and great builders of monuments such as the temples on Mt. Ābu and Mt. Girnār. Anupamā was the wife of Tejaḥpāla, the younger brother. She was the daughter of Dharaṇiga, a merchant from the town of Chandrāvatī at the foot of Mt. Ābu. Both the brothers respected Anupamā's advice in all matters. It was on her advice that the Ābu temple, that magnificent specimen of Indian architecture and sculpture, better known nowadays as Delwārā temple, was built by Tejaḥpāla. The *Prabandha-kosha* (Siṅghī Series Edition, p. 101) of Rājashekharasūri states that while going on a pilgrimage to the Jaina holy places in Saurāṣhṭra, Vastupāla and Tejaḥpāla went to bury their wealth, amounting to a total of about one lakh, near a village called Haḍālaka (modern Hadālā, near Dhandhukā in the Ahmedābād district). There, while digging the earth, they got more wealth. Vastupāla asked Anupamā as to what should be done with this treasure. Anupamā replied: "It may be kept on the peaks of the mountains, so that it may not fall into the hands of some others, as it has fallen into ours." And Vastupāla and Tejaḥpāla spent it in building temples on Girnār and Ābu, and leading *saṅghas* (pilgrim caravans) to the holy place of Shatruñjaya.

The advice of Anupamā has come true, and no public work of Vastupāla and Tejaḥpāla,—and their public works as described in the old chronicles number several hundred—except the temples on Ābu and Girnār, has been preserved to this day. Anupamā constantly supervised the building of the Ābu temple and it was at her instance that the artisans working there were provided with amenities about food, rest, etc. It is generally believed that the Ābu temple, which is called Luṇavasati in old chronicles, was built in memory of Vastupāla's elder brother Luṇiga. But inscriptions in the temple itself mention that it was built for the spiritual welfare of Tejaḥpāla's wife Anupamā and son Luṇasiṁha.

Anupamā took keen interest in literature and philosophy. She was praised by the followers of six philosophical systems as *ṣhaḍdarshana-mātā*, or the mother of six *darshanas* (systems of philosophy), on account of her equal treatment of all in the matter of patronage and donation. She has been credited with the composition of *Kaṅkaṇa-kāvya,* which has been mentioned as her own work

(*Purātana-prabandha-saṁgraha,* p. 63). We are also told about two reciters of religious stories, both known as Pippalāchārya, who had won a large prize from Tejaḥpāla and Anupamā by singing before them the life of Satī Chandanabālā.

We also know from the Prabandhas and allied works that Vastupāla and Tejaḥpāla built a lake called Anupamā-sara on Shatruñjaya in honour of this wise lady. The *Samarā Rāsu* (1315 A.D.) of Ambadeva-sūri, an old Gujarātī poem composed about a century after the construction of the lake, mentions it in the course of a description of pilgrimage to Shatruñjaya.

Anupamā died before her husband Tejaḥpāla. The *Prabandha-chintāmaṇi* has narrated a characteristic incident in this connection: On her death Tejaḥpāla was smitten with grief. Then Āchārya Vijayasena (his family preceptor) came and assuaged his sorrow. When Tejaḥpāla had partially recovered his self-command, he was a little ashamed of himself, and the Āchārya said to him: "We have come to see this fraud of yours." Vastupāla asked the revered teacher what this meant. He said: "When Tejaḥpāla was a boy, I asked for him from Dharaṇiga the hand of the maiden Anupamā in marriage, and arrangements were concluded. Afterwards he heard of the lack of beauty of the maiden, and in order to break off the engagement, he offered the Kṣhetrapāla in the shrine of Jina Chandraprabha eatables and other things worth eight Drammas. Now he is despondent on account of the pain of separation from her. Of these two phases, which is true?" Thus reminded, Tejaḥpāla made his heart firm.

The *Purātana-prabandha-saṁgraha* quotes a Sanskrit verse uttered by a contemporary poet in praise of Anupamā: "Lakṣhmī (the goddess of wealth) is fickle, the spouse of Shiva is Chaṇḍī (the terrible), Sachī (wife of Indra, king of the gods) has the fault of having a co-wife, Gaṅgā goes downwards, Saraswatī (the goddess of learning) possesses merely the virtue of speech, but in contrast (to all of them) Anupamā is Anupamā (incomparable)."

2. Some Saint-Poetesses

Now we would review very briefly the life and works of a few women from Gujarāt who were both saints and poetesses.[1]

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[1] For many of the details in this section I am indebted to a paper read before the

Krishṇābāī: She was a Nāgar brahmin. Her chief work is *Sītājīnī Kāñchali* (Sītā's Bodice), depicting an episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. She also wrote some stray poems pertaining to the life of Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa.

Gavarībāī: She, too, was a Nāgar brahmin and was a resident of Duṅgarpur. She was born in 1759 A.D. and was married at the age of five or six, but she became a widow very shortly. She applied herself to learning and also to devotion. Later she wrote a large number of poems. We are told there is a manuscript containing six hundred and fifty-two of her devotional lyrics, very few of which have been printed. According to the same authority, she is stated to be the best among the known poetesses of medieval Gujarāt.

Purībāī: Nothing is known about her life. Her poem *Sītāmaṅgala* is well known, and women of some castes in Gujarāt recite it at the time of marriage.

Divālībāī: Her father was a brahmin from Ḍabhoi near Baroda, who in the great famine of A.D. 1781, found it difficult to maintain her and entrusted her to a monk. The monk educated her and taught her the *Rāmāyaṇa* and other religious books, and she became a staunch devotee of Rāma. Finally she settled down in Baroda. We do not know the dates of Divālībāī's birth and death. She has composed hundreds of stray poems on incidents from the life of Rāma, mostly his birth, childhood play, marriage and coronation.

Rādhābāī: This lady was a Mahārāṣhṭra brahmin residing at Baroda. Not much is known about her life, except that she was a disciple of a holy man called Avadhūtanātha, whom she accepted as her guru in A.D. 1834. Rādhābāī has written a number of devotional poems in a language which is a mixture of Gujarātī, Marāṭhī and Hindī.

Janībāī: She was a saint and poetess of the Shākta sect, and was a pupil of Miṭhu or Mithu Mahārāj (1738-91 A.D.), who was a great exponent of the Shakti cult in Gujarāt. In 1802 she wrote

third Gujarātī Literary Conference, Rājkot, 1909, by Shrīmatī Vidyāgaurī Nīlkaṇṭh, who has made a special study of the medieval poetesses of Gujarāt.

a poem called *Navanāyikā-darshana*. In another work, called *Nāthajī-prākaṭya* (literally, Manifestation of the Lord), she has described the divine birth of her guru. She died in 1812. She was thoroughly conversant with the mystical teachings and philosophical tenets of the Shākta school, and her works, along with those of her teacher, would give the reader a good idea of the prevalence of this sect in the Gujarāt of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER XX

GREAT HINDU WOMEN IN EAST INDIA

1. Rulers and Administrators

Vishwāsadevī: An outstanding personality in the cultural history of India in the mid-fifteenth century was Vishwāsadevī, the senior wife of Padmasiṁha, younger brother and successor of King Shivasiṁha of Tirhut. She was an extremely capable and cultured woman, and acted very successfully as the regent during her husband's lifetime. She had compiled a treatise on Gaṅgā worship, entitled *Gaṅgā-vākyāvalī*, and on her request the court pandit and poet Vidyāpati appended some authoritative quotations to the work.[1] Vidyāpati was also commissioned by the queen to compile *Shaiva-sarvaswa-hāra*, a treatise on the worship of Shiva. In the opening verses of the latter work, Vidyāpati has been eloquent in extolling Vishwāsadevī as an able administratrix, a devoted wife and a pious and bountiful woman.

Chauching: In the late medieval period, the social status of women in the hilly regions on the northern, north-eastern and eastern fringe of north-east India seems to have been much higher than that of their sisters in other parts of the country. As a matter of fact, they were the compeers of men in every sphere of life except perhaps the military. There were women sovereigns, regents and administrators from the sixteenth century, when their written history begins, up to the eighteenth century.

The earliest woman politician in Assamese history was Chauching. She was the daughter of the defeated chieftain of the Chuṭiyās and was married to King Suklenmung of Assam (A.D. 1562). She was a very accomplished woman. It was on her advice that the king fortified his headquarters Gārāgāo with a deep trench around, which soon proved to be a very wise precaution. It was also at her

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[1] S. Sen, *Vidyāpati-goṣhṭhī*, p. 19.

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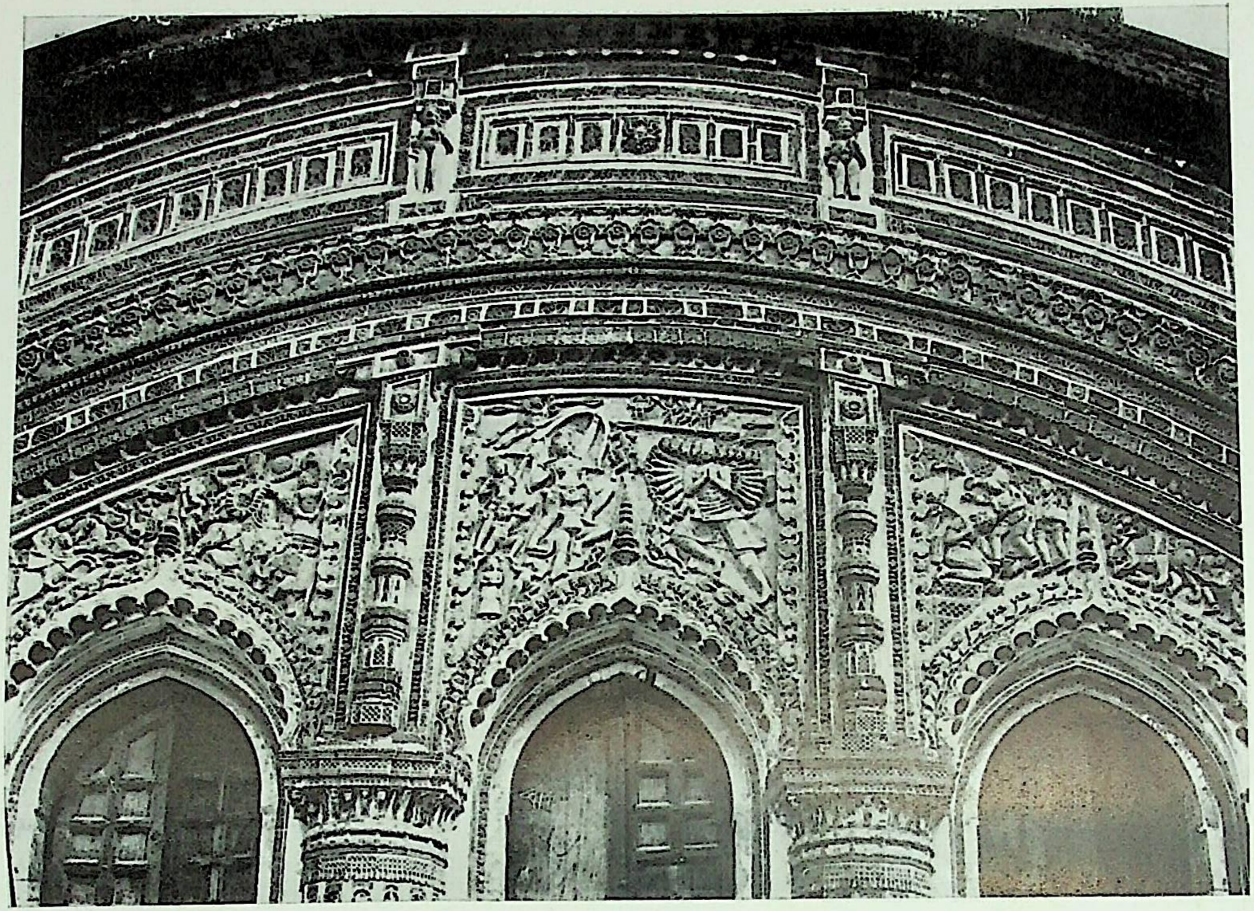
instance that the post of Varapātra was created as the third member of the council of Ahom kings.

In Arakan, brothers and sisters jointly inherited paternal property. The seventeenth-century poet Ataol mentions that when King Thado-Mintār died, he was succeeded by his son and daughter. The latter, being senior, was the real ruler. The poet's patron Magan-Ṭhākur was her chief minister.

Chandraprabhā: One of the most romantic feminine figures in Indian history is Chandraprabhā, though she is altogether unknown to the general public. She was the wife of Tāmradhwaja, king of Kachar, who ruled in the last decade of the eighteenth century. She was a famous beauty and had exceptionally long hair.

King Rudrasiṁha of Assam annexed part of the territory of Tāmradhwaja, who, by making an alliance with the Jayantiyā chief Rāmasiṁha, repelled the subsequent attacks of the Assamese army. Rāmasiṁha now wanted to possess Chandraprabhā, and held Tāmradhwaja a prisoner. Chandraprabhā ruled her husband's dominion from Khāspur, but did not know what had happened to him. She decided to make alliance with the king of Assam and with his help rescue her husband. She wrote an appealing letter to Rudrasiṁha, who received the message with favour and asked which of his ministers would undertake the difficult task of rescuing Tāmradhwaja. The minister known as Bairāgi Barabaruā offered his services. On the pretext of a combined tour and pilgrimage he managed to encamp a few miles off Jayantīpur, the capital of Rāmasiṁha. He gave it to understand that he was out to find a suitable match for the daughter of his king. Rāmasiṁha fell into the trap and came to his camp, accompanied by his eldest son and Tāmradhwaja. They were easily captured. Tāmradhwaja submitted to the king of Assam and returned safely to Khāspur.

He does not seem to have lived long after his restoration. He was succeeded by his son Shūradarpa, but for some time at least it was the dowager queen who ruled Kachar. She was a patron of learning and poetry. At her instance Bhuvaneshwara Vāchaspati, a learned member of her court, wrote *Nāradī-rasāmṛita,* an adaptation of *Nāradīya Purāṇa,* in Bengali verse. It appears that she was largely responsible for the spread of Sanskritic culture in Kachar.



BARANAGAR TEMPLE (MURSHIDABAD)

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Rānī Bhavānī: In the latter half of the eighteenth century the name of Rānī Bhavānī was a household word in Bengal, and the fame of her administrative ability and munificence is still living in proverbial expressions. She was the wife of Rāmakānta, the adopted son and successor of the founder of the Nāṭor estate in north Bengal. Rāmakānta had neither the intelligence nor the capacity to manage his big estate, and soon after his accession he began to lose money and land until his young wife came to his rescue. Bhavānī took charge of the management, and the estate was once more prosperous. Rāmakānta died in 1746, but long before that his wife was recognized as the real owner of the estate.

When her husband died, she had only a daughter named Tārā living. She was given in marriage to Raghunāth Lāhiri, and the latter was made the manager of the estate. Raghunāth died in 1751, leaving a young childless widow. Bhavānī once again took up the management of the estate, and she was so successful that in a few years she came to own as a zemindar a good slice of Bengal, fetching a revenue of about a crore and a half of rupees. She died at the age of seventy-nine, and was succeeded by her adopted son Rāmakṛishṇa.

Bhavānī's life was a pattern of disciplined activity, and her routine from the day when she was left a young widow up till death remained almost the same. From the early hours of dawn till late morning she would be occupied with her daily religious observances. Then she would cook meals for ten Brāhmaṇas and feed them, and when she took her own breakfast, it would be long past midday. Next she would come to the office and give the necessary orders verbally. Her evenings were passed in listening to recitals from the Purāṇas. Then her manager would come for her signature to written orders, charters, grants and important communications. This was followed by a visit to the bank of the river, where she would set adrift an earthen lamp burning ghee. She would return home, take some light refreshments and again come to the office. This was the time when her tenants and visitors would meet her with their prayers and grievances. The audience was usually over by about ten o'clock, and then she would retire for the night, but not before she had inquired about the welfare of the members of her household.

Rānī Bhavānī's name has been handed down to posterity chiefly on account of her unprecedented charities. In innumerable villages of Bengal, especially along the Gaṅgā, learned and pious brahmins received land grants from her to be enjoyed in perpetuity. She also built numerous temples, and made ample endowments for the worship of notable deities in important pilgrim centres. Some of the most prominent temples and ghats at Banāras were built by her. In fact that holy city owes much to this great and pious woman.

2. Vaiṣhṇava Devotees

Sachīdevī: Sachī, the mother of Shrī Chaitanya, is one of the most self-effacing of the great women in our history. She was the daughter of a very well known family of Bengal which had migrated from north-east Bengal and settled at Nadiā. Her father Nīlāmbar Chakravartī was a very influential man. Sachī was married to Jagannātha (also known as Purandara) Mishra, a quiet, pious brahmin pandit of humble means also coming from north-east Bengal. But she never complained. After she had lost eight infant girls in succession, she took initiation from Adwaita Āchārya, the great scholar and spiritual leader of Shāntipur. Her next issue was Vishwarūpa, who grew up to be a fine, promising youth, but he became a *sannyāsin* (monk) when his brother, Chaitanya, then known as Vishwambhara, was a mere child. This was a terrible blow to the parents. The father did not long survive the shock, but Sachī took it meekly and waited for the day when Vishwambhara would flower into manhood and prosperity.

The hope was going to be more than fulfilled. Young Chaitanya by his looks, scholarship and personality became the leader of an ever-growing band of influential men, the like of whom had never been known before. But Sachī's domestic happiness was short-lived, for at the age of twenty-four Chaitanya, too, became a *sannyāsin*, leaving his old mother and childless young wife in the lurch. This called forth the best in the character of the heroic mother, for she permitted her son to renounce. Her sacrifice was unbounded; her submission to the will of God was complete. One can well imagine the unending chain of cheerless, hopeless days and nights which this forlorn odd pair—a poor, aged widow and a young wife—had to pass through till death. The cruellest blow was yet to come. When Chaitanya died twenty-four years later, at the age of forty-eight, Sachī was living, and she must have been pretty old. But she bore it all, for her fortitude was unshakable.

Vishṇupriyā: When his first wife Lakṣhmī died of snake-bite, Chaitanya married a second time, only for the sake of his mother. His second wife Vishṇupriyā was the daughter of Sanātana, a rich and respectable court pandit. As a young bride and daughter-in-law, she was not lacking in anything, but Chaitanya's domestic life was practically finished, and when he renounced home, Vishṇupriyā was left with a heavy charge of looking after her mother-in-law, bowed down with age and sorrow. She devoted more time in taking the name of God and worshipping the memory of her husband. She was extremely bashful and considering herself a very unlucky woman, she did not like to meet anybody outside the small family circle. Before the devotees and younger followers of Chaitanya, she appeared behind a curtain, so that her feet only were visible. She led a life of severe austerity. She would take the name of God and count it by putting aside a grain of rice for each utterance. When the count was over, she would boil those few grains of rice, and that was her meal for the day. This spirit of renunciation was indeed fitting for Chaitanya's spouse.

Jāhnavā: Women teachers (*āchāryās*) of Tāntrika Buddhism were not unknown in eastern India during the rule of the Pālas. Mention may be made of Queen Lakṣhmīṅkarā and Chintā the *sahaja-yoginī*, both hailing from Orissa. Muhammadan domination forced the softer sex to restrict their activities within the four walls of the household. But Chaitanya's faith put new life into the people, and by raising the position of Rādhā above that of Kṛishṇa, it indirectly put a premium on the merit of womanhood as such. It is then no wonder that from the middle of the sixteenth century women spiritual leaders or gurus made their sporadic but unmistakable appearance in Bengal Vaishṇavism. The first two Vaishṇava *āchāryās* were the junior wives of Nityānanda and Adwaita, the two leaders of Vaishṇavism in Bengal after Chaitanya.

When Nityānanda died, his son Vīrachandra was very young, and so the leadership passed on to Vīrachandra's step-mother Jāhnavā, who was a thoroughly capable woman. She was well read in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Vaishṇava texts and had a dominant personality. She had the far-sightedness to make closer contact with the *goswāmins* (Vaishṇava leaders) of Vṛīndāvan, led by Sanātana, Rūpa and Jīva. Although it meant the suppression of the fissiparous tendencies that had appeared in Vaishṇavism in Bengal, her hand was strengthened, and those tendencies received a strong check. Jāhnavā attended the festivals and gatherings to which the leading Vaishṇavas were invited, and her status was in no way inferior to the most prominent of the living *goswāmins*. She was eulogized by her daughter-in-law in a short poem in Sanskrit.

Sītā: Adwaita's junior wife Sītā was a very competent person. She was present at the house of Jagannātha and Sachī, parents of Chaitanya, when the latter was born, and it was she who gave Chaitanya his earliest name, Nimāi. She was a second mother to Chaitanya and his elder brother, and she was the only woman who had approach to Chaitanya during his twenty-four years of mendicancy. Adwaita Āchārya had many sons, and only the eldest of them, Achyutānanda, followed faithfully the path of Chaitanya. But he had become a monk. Adwaita was on the wrong side of fifty when Chaitanya was born, and lived much beyond a century. Long before his death, Sītā had taken charge of the groups of Vaishṇavas that had gathered round him, and she had a large following of her own. Two of them, Nandinī and Jaṅgalī, her personal servants, were reputed to have extraordinary esoteric powers. Sītā's greatness has been extolled in two or three biographical treatises, one of which was written during her lifetime. Her spiritual eminence obtained for her a permanent recognition among the few revered persons of Bengal Vaishṇavism.

Ichchhādevī: In the subsequent centuries women gurus among the Bengal Vaishṇavas, especially in the family of Nityānanda, Adwaita, Shrīnivāsa, Shyāmānanda and other *goswāmins* were not rare. Shyāmānanda was a simple and a very pious man. His disciple Rasikānanda (also called Rasika Murāri) came from a very influential family and was a strong force to establish the cult of *ahiṁsā* (non-injury) and devotion in a large territory that was uncultured and primitive. Rasikānanda's wife Ichchhādevī was his worthy consort, as we know from the *Bhakti-ratnākara* by Narahari

Chakravartin, and she appears to us to be the first known Bengalee woman to write verse in the vernacular.

Hemalatā: The greatest woman in Vaiṣhṇava history in the early seventeenth century was Hemalatā. She was the daughter of Shrīnivāsa Āchārya and was married to Rāmakṛiṣhṇa Chaṭṭa of Budhaipārā on the Hooghly, but had no issue. Hemalatā was considered the true spiritual successor of her father, and after the death of the Āchārya, some of his disciples and followers attached themselves to her. One of these was her personal attendant, and was among the best known poets of the day. He was Yadunandana, the translator of three Sanskrit works—*Vidagdha-Mādhava*, *Govinda-līlāmṛita* and *Kriṣhṇa-karṇāmṛita*—into narrative Bengali verse.

Hemalatā seems to have been interested in the esoteric or Tāntrika form of Vaiṣhṇavism and a few of her followers wrote treatises on this topic. There is a mystic poem bearing her name as the author, but it appears to be spurious.

3. Literary Women

Chandrāvatī: Women members of the leading Vaiṣhṇava families were generally literate, and some of them were educated in Sanskrit. Their original compositions in Bengali and Sanskrit are extant. It need not, however, be presumed that outside the Vaiṣhṇava fold educated and literary women did not exist. But only a few such names have come down to us.

The earliest and best known of such women is Chandrāvatī. She was the only child of Vaṁshīdāsa (or Vaṁshīvādana) Chakravartī of Mymensingh, a writer and singer of *Manasā-maṅgala* poetry, who must have lived in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Chandrāvatī inherited her father's literary gift and seems to have assisted him in writing the poem on Manasā (the goddess of serpents), and probably composed such a poem independently. Her work exists only in some stray verses bearing the name of Chandrapati (popular corruption for Chandrāvatī), imbedded in the Manasā poems going by the names of her father as also of Nārāyaṇadeva and Vijayagupta. Chandrāvatī also wrote a very short narrative poem on the story of Rāma, to be sung by womenfolk in marriage, a few lines of which have been preserved, including an account of her ancestry and the extreme indigence of the family.

According to the tradition carried down by popular ballads from Mymensingh, Chandrāvatī's life presents a sad but romantic tale. She loved Jayānanda, whom she had known from childhood, and their marriage was settled. But before the ceremony could be gone through, Jayānanda was involved in an accident away from his village. He was rescued by a Muslim family and could not return home for a considerable time. When he came back, he was considered an outcaste, and it was no longer possible for Chandrāvatī to marry him. It may be guessed that she died an old maid.

Ānandamayī and Gaṅgāmayī: In the eighteenth century, literary activity on a minor scale among women was not very uncommon, but with one or two exceptions history is silent about them. We know of two sisters (or cousins), Ānandamayī and Gaṅgāmayī, belonging to a Vaidya family from Faridpur. Ānandamayī helped her uncle Jayanārāyaṇ Ray when he wrote the poem *Hari-līlā* (1772).

Gaṅgāmaṇi: Women taking up the singing of *kīrtana* (devotional music) as their profession were making their influence felt towards the end of the eighteenth century when it was becoming a fashion in the urban areas. Some of them, whether professional or not, were also good composers. One such was Gaṅgāmaṇi, whose father Gopīmohan Chakravartī was one of the best known *kīrtana* singers of his day as also a noted composer of songs. He belonged to north-east Burdwan. The following is a sample of her composition:

"O friend, who is he sporting under the *kadamba* tree there? He possesses the glory of the autumn moon. When I get down into the Yamunā, there again I find the same Dark One glowing under the water. The effulgence of His feet is up on the surface—oh, what a beauty in the river! It floats on the waters as the lotus."

Haṭī Vidyālaṅkāra: The eighteenth century is generally accepted as the darkest period in our history. But even in it we have at least one woman who was not only a match for the best Sanskrit pandits of the day but also had a Sanskrit school (*chatuṣhpāṭhī*) of her own, where the usual subjects of higher Sanskrit learning were taught. Her name was Haṭī Vidyālaṅkāra, and she belonged to the old village of Soñāi in west Burdwan, which abounded in brahmin families of great erudition and piety. Nothing is known about the family of Haṭī. She was probably a widow from childhood and was a devout Vaishṇava. At the fag-end of her life she came to Banāras and taught pupils there, but after some time she gave it up and came to Vṛindāvan, where she passed the rest of her life in spiritual meditation. At this stage she wrote some devotional songs in Vraja-bhāṣhā. These are among the well known treasures of Hindi literature.

CHAPTER XXI

GREAT MUSLIM WOMEN OF INDIA

1. Introduction

In the eastern countries, especially those which came under the influence of Islam, women have generally been assigned a place in the background, and their manifold activities in the various spheres of national life, political, social and cultural, have seldom been given prominence to by the Muslim historians, while they have depicted the glorious deeds of their men with minute care. The old maxim, "A woman's place is in her home," has found repeated and emphatic support in the utterances of Muslim saints and philosophers as well as those of other oriental communities, and has been an article of faith with the Muslim people generally. It must not, however, be supposed—as it is too often—that Islam has relegated women to an inferior social position, or that the Muslims as a community have ever treated their women with contempt and decried their natural talents. That our historians are so shy of dilating upon the human virtues and intellectual gifts of women, has chiefly been due to a false notion of respectability. To the Muslims women are a sacred trust, the *'harīm* or *haram,'* which has to be guarded with jealous care and protected from the prying eyes of the populace; they are not to be dragged into the limelight of publicity, and their deeds, however noble, should not be broadcast, since they were meant for the special benefit of their male relatives.

To what ridiculous extent this notion of secrecy and concealment was exaggerated in later times, may be judged from the fact that it was commonly considered irreverent to mention even the names of respectable women, and reference was made to any one of them only as the daughter, wife or sister of such and such a person with the addition of certain laudatory epithets, like *ismat panāh* (the refuge of innocence) and *iffat ma'āb* (the asylum of chastity). Thus it is that there are very few records of the glorious work done by Muslim women in the various Islamic countries inside and outside their homes. The story of their selfless devotion to their sons, brothers and husbands, of their noble deeds of self-sacrifice in the interest of their families and countries, and of their countless contributions to the material and spiritual welfare of their peoples, remains either entirely untold or but very inadequately narrated. It is only here and there in the pages of history and biography that we come across the names of certain women whose outstanding personalities and extraordinary achievements could not be veiled and obscured even by our prudish writers obsessed by conventional social ideas. Yet even from the meagre information with which our historians have grudgingly supplied us, it is not difficult to realize the important role that Muslim women have played in the medieval period of Indian history.

All the Muslim rulers who reigned in India during this period, with the exception of the Syeds, the Lodīs and the Sūrs, were of Turkish or Mongol origin, and they brought with them into this country the old, nomadic traditions of their ancestors, who roamed from place to place over the pasture-lands of central Asia. Segregation of women was a physical impossibility in a pastoral society, and Turkish women, like their earlier sisters of pre-Islamic Arabia, enjoyed a measure of freedom scarcely to be found among other peoples. They were treated as equals of men in all matters pertaining to peace or war, rode side by side with their men, and were skilled in the use of the lance and the bow. They exercised great influence on their male relations and were consulted in all important affairs. Thus, Ibn Batūta has left us an interesting account of how the queens of the great Khān of the Golden Horde held court and received visitors.[1] Bābur's mother Qutluq Nigār and his sister Khānzāde Begum were among his wisest counsellors during his arduous campaigns for the recovery of his father's heritage, the kingdom of Farghana. Humāyūn used to consult the ladies of his household frequently and had set apart three days in the week for meeting them in convivial gatherings; and still later we find talented princesses like Nūr Jahān and Jahān Ārā taking an active part in the state affairs.

Polygamy, no doubt, was widely practised, specially by the members of noble and well-to-do families, but very often the co-wives lived amicably together like sisters, sharing in the joys and sorrows of one another. It seldom entered their minds to question the legitimacy or propriety of this institution, and on the whole their lives were happy and contented. Nor did it interfere with their dignity and self-respect or detract from their position as the proud partners of their husbands. In India the Muslims came into contact with a social order different in several respects from the one to which they had been used, but they were quick to perceive its fine points and the noble principles on which it was based. They were specially struck by the high ideals of Hindu chivalry and were filled with admiration for the noble and selfless devotion of Hindu women, so that with the fusion of Hindu and Muslim cultures, there was evolved in the course of time a code of chivalry which combined the best traditions of the two communities, and which remains unparalleled in the history of the human race.

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[1] H. A. R. Gibb, *Selections from the Travels of Ibn Batūtā*, pp. 146-8.

In the limited space at our disposal we can only describe very briefly the career of some of the most distinguished Muslim women of India. Most of them belonged to the princely class, for we have hardly any material for the reconstruction of the life-stories of those thousands of noble women in humbler walks of life whose heroic deeds remain unsung. But room has been found for two or three of them, whose saintly character makes them stand out prominently in the troubled days of Delhi Sultānate—to whom it was not given to wield the royal sceptre or sway the hearts of mighty princes, but whose gentle hands and gentler words comforted those who worked for the moral and spiritual uplift of the common people.

2. Queens and Princesses

Razīya Sultān: Razīya, the daughter of the great Slave king Īltutmish, has the unique distinction of being the only woman who ever occupied the throne of Delhi. Shortly after his return from the Gwālior campaign, Īltutmish is said to have formally nominated her as his successor, and he stuck to his decision in spite of the vigorous protests of his proud nobles, who were scandalized by the idea of having a woman as their sovereign. He had a poor opinion about the capabilities of his sons, and did not consider any of them to be a suitable successor. Razīya, on the other hand, was not only well versed in the reading of the Koran, but had a fair knowledge of several other sciences and possessed all the qualities necessary for a wise ruler. She had, moreover, given ample proof of her dauntless courage by accompanying her father in several campaigns. "The men of discernment," remarks Firishta, "could find no defect in her except that she was created in the form of a woman,"[2] and the events of her brief reign, which ended tragically, fully justify this remark.

When Īltutmish died in A.D. 1236, the Turkish nobles, disregarding his express wishes, set up one of his sons, Ruknuddīn Fīrūz Shāh, on the throne. Gentle and amiable by nature, this prince, soon after his accession, gave himself up to pleasure leaving the state affairs in the hands of his ambitious mother, Shāhi-Turkān, a Turkish slave-girl, who started a systematic persecution of the rival queens. She put to death several of them and blinded the youngest son of Īltutmish, Sultān Qutbuddīn. These high-handed actions provoked the wrath of the nobles, who, repenting of their folly, revolted against Ruknuddīn and proclaimed Razīya as the Sultān of Delhi. Razīya ascended the throne in A.D. 1236, and casting aside the veil,[3] held court in her father's palace. But she had a difficult task before her. The Shamsī nobles, whom even Īltutmish could control with great difficulty, wanted to keep all power in their own hands. Razīya's accession, moreover, was not recognized by some of them, who soon rose up in revolt. Undaunted, Razīya marched out against their combined armies and sent word to Malik Nasīruddīn of Oudh to come to her help. The latter was defeated and captured by the recalcitrant nobles before he could join forces with her, but Razīya succeeded single-handed in routing the rebels. One of them, Malik Kūchī, was seized and executed, another, 'Alā'uddīn Sher Khāni, was pursued and killed at Bahal, while a third fled to Sirmor, where he died shortly afterwards.

Razīya had now a comparatively peaceful time, and carried on the administration of her vast kingdom with great skill and wisdom. She realized that it was necessary for the welfare of the country to curb the power of the Turkish nobles, and with this end in view she promoted an Abyssinian slave, Yāqūt, to the high office of master of the royal stables, lavishing great favours upon him and setting him up as a rival to the Shamsī nobles. But she had, unfortunately, miscalculated the latter's power. The inordinate partiality to Yāqūt proved her undoing, for even the loyal amirs now turned hostile to her, and one of them, Malik A'azzuddīn Kabīr Khāni, the governor of Lahore, rose in open rebellion. Razīya, nevertheless, was able to cope with him, and he was compelled to surrender. Soon afterwards, however, Malik Altūniya of Bhāṭiṇḍā raised the banner of revolt, and as Razīya marched out to meet the new menace, the Turkish nobles in her camp succeeded in putting Malik Yāqūt to death. Left without a loyal protector, Razīya was now a prisoner in their hands. They took her with them to Bhāṭiṇḍā, confined her in the fort there, reconciled Altūniya, and proclaimed Razīya's brother Bahrām Shāh as Sultān of Delhi.

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[2] *Firishta* (Lucknow Edition), Vol. I, pp. 67-9.

[3] This she did some time after her accession, for Khusrau says in the '*Ashīqa*: "For a few months her sun was hidden in the clouds; the gleam of her sword flashed like lightning from behind her veil." (Aligarh Edition, p. 49).

She, however, did not give way to despair yet and won over her captor, Altūniya, to her side. She married him, and recruiting an army of Khokhars and other zemindars, they marched out together to recapture the lost throne. She was, however, faced by a numerically superior army under the able command of Īltutmish's son-in-law, Malik Jalāluddīn Balban, and was defeated in a severe battle fought at Kaithal. She and her husband fled to Bhāṭiṇḍā and managed to collect another army for a last desperate attempt. But luck had deserted her, and Balban again routed her forces. Fleeing from the battle-field, Altūniya and Razīya both fell into the hands of some zemindars, who murdered them (1240 A.D.). Thus ended the short reign of the wise queen, who failed, not because of any personal shortcoming, but because of the silly prejudices and unreasonable ambition of her nobles. She ruled for three years and a half, and throughout this period, says Khusrau, "Nobody could point out any mistake committed by her."[4] She lies buried in a part of old Delhi known as Bulbuli Khānā, and in an unpretentious mausoleum, the sole relic of a great queen and a noble daughter of India.

Gulbadan Begum: She was the daughter of Emperor Bābur by his wife Dildār Begum. Born in 1523 A.D., Gulbadan was adopted by his first queen Māham Begum, the mother of Emperor

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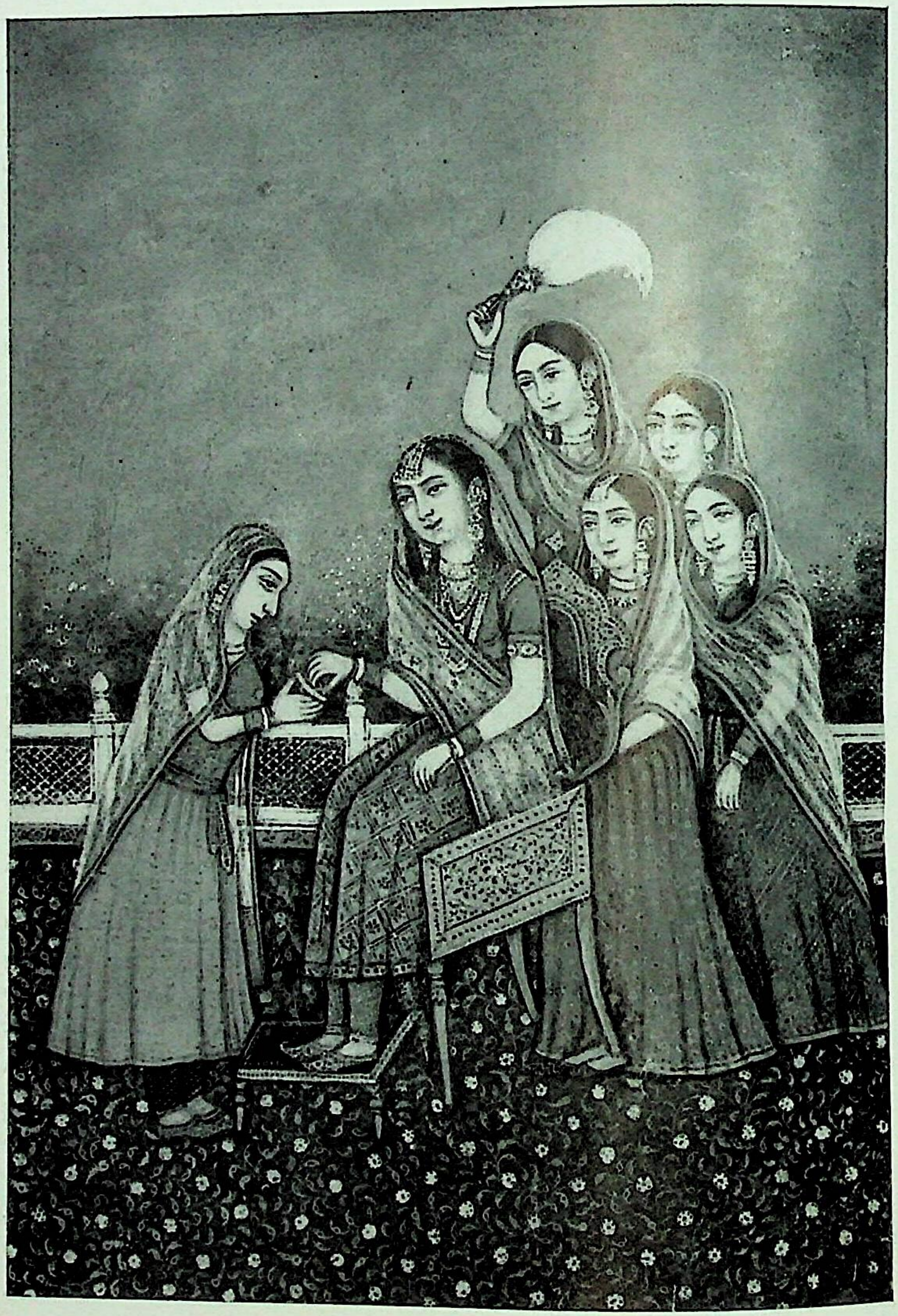
[4] *'Ashīqa, loc. cit.*



NŪR JAHĀN AND ATTENDANTS
Courtesy: Mohammad Wahid Mirza

Humāyūn. Though her life was passed amid the changing political situations in the country, partly in different places of northern India and partly at Kābul, she received a good education. She married Khidr Khwāja, and her only daughter Ruqayya Sultān was married to Emperor Akbar. Despite his dissuasions, she made a very hazardous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1575, reaching her destination after nearly two years. She stayed in Hijaz for three years and a half, spending large sums in charity, and returned safely to India after another adventurous journey. She spent the last few years of her life in pious devotion and charitable deeds, and died peacefully at the ripe old age of eighty in 1603. Her death was a great loss to Akbar and his mother, for her wisdom and rich experience had helped them to solve many a knotty problem. The emperor not only accompanied her bier but carried it on his shoulders for part of her last journey.

Gulbadan Begum has immortalized her name by writing the *Humāyūn-nāmāh,*[5] a work which was till recent times comparatively unknown, but which has since been recognized as the most valuable contemporary record of Humāyūn's reign.[6] This small work has no literary pretensions, being written in simple Persian with a large admixture of Turkish words, but it is of great human interest and gives us a remarkable picture of the intimate life of Emperor Humāyūn and other members of his family. Gulbadan possessed considerable poetic talent, but unfortunately her verses have not been preserved.

Nūr Jahān Begum: The daughter of an impoverished Persian noble and a foundling, Nūr Jahān, whose life-story reads like a real romance, rose to be the greatest Muslim queen of India. Her father Mirzā Ghayāth Beg was the scion of a distinguished family of Persia, which had fallen upon bad days. Finding his life in Persia to be intolerable, he started for India with his wife and children, under the protection of a caravan led by a rich merchant named Malik Masūd. With his kind help they travelled on to Āgrā, the capital of Emperor Akbar. Their benefactor, who had influential friends at the court, got Mirzā Ghayāth and his two sons presented to Akbar, who appointed all of them to certain petty offices. This was the commencement of Nūr Jahān's phenomenal rise to greatness, for she soon became a great favourite with the ladies of the royal household and frequented the palace in the company of her mother.

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[5] Persian text with English translation and copious notes published by Mrs. A. Beveridge in 1902.

[6] The only other contemporary history is the *Tadhkirat al-Wāq'āt* of Jauhar Āftābchī.

The story of her first romantic meeting with Jahāngīr, then Prince Salīm, in a garden of the royal palace, when her girlish innocence and ready wit captured the young prince's heart so that he wanted to marry her, may or may not be true.[7] But it would seem likely that Jahāngīr was deeply touched by her beauty, grace and wisdom even in those early days. She was, however, married at the age of seventeen to 'Alī Qulī Khān, entitled Sher Afghān Khān, whom Akbar appointed governor of Burdwan, and for a time Nūr Jahān passed out of Prince Salīm's life. But when in 1605 that prince ascended the throne of Hindustān, fate contrived to bring them together again. Sher Afghān Khān was suspected of complicity in treason against the new emperor. Jahāngīr authorized his foster-brother Qutbuddīn, the viceroy of Bengal, to "send Sher Afghān to court, and, in case of disobedience, to bring him to punishment." Qutbuddīn proceeded to Burdwan. As soon as Sher Afghān entered the camp of Qutbuddīn, he was surrounded on all sides by the royal troops. Sher Afghān suspecting treachery, drew his sword and struck Qutbuddīn. The latter's followers now fell upon Sher Afghān and cut him to pieces.[8] His palace was surrounded, and Nūr Jahān was captured and conveyed to the royal court.

Four years later, she was married to the emperor at the age of thirty-four, and received successively the titles of Nūr Mahal (the light of the palace) and Nūr Jahān (the light of the world).[9] She now found a vast field for the exercise of her varied talents, gaining fame for charitable deeds, clever innovations in food, jewellery and dress, skill in riding and the use of weapons. For eleven years she carried on the administration of the greatest empire in the world of the time by her wise statesmanship and her great influence on the emperor. She, as a matter of fact, dominated her royal husband as no woman in Indian history has ever done, so that Jahāngīr had left most of the state affairs to her care, contenting himself with a life of ease and comfort.[10] Firmans were issued under her seal, and her name was struck on coins, one of which bore the legend: "By the command of Emperor Jahāngīr, gold has acquired a hundredfold beauty with the name on it of Nūr Jahān, the emperor's royal consort." Her father was promoted to the rank of prime minister with the title of I'timād-ud-daulā, while his two sons also received responsible posts.

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[7] According to this story, Jahāngīr had entrusted a pair of pigeons to Nūr Jahān's care while he busied himself with something else in a *mīnā* bazaar. One of the pigeons escaped, and when the prince asked her how it had flown away, the girl artlessly released the other saying, "Thus, O prince!"

[8] This happened in 1607. The account is based upon *History of Jahangir* by Beni Prasad.

[9] Her original name was Mihr-un-Nisā Begum. The fact that she was already past her prime, would clearly show that Jahāngīr was attracted towards her not so much by her physical charms as by her intellectual qualities.

History and legend have surrounded Nūr Jahān's personality with many stories. She is reputed to have been the inventor of the attar of roses, though the credit really belongs to her mother. On one occasion she is said to have shot four tigers with gun and arrow, when the emperor was so pleased with her skill that he presented her with a diamond ring worth one lakh of rupees, and distributed one thousand gold mohurs among the poor and needy. The story of how a stray arrow from her bow killed a washerman on the river-bank near the royal palace, and how on a complaint from the dead man's wife, Jahāngīr ordered Nūr Jahān to be brought to his court of justice like any ordinary criminal, is too well known to need repetition here.

But the last few years of their married life were not very happy. Prince Khurram (Shāh Jahān), Jahāngīr's eldest son, was the obvious successor to the throne, and his cause was championed by Āsaf Khān, whose daughter, the famous Mumtāz Mahal was married to him. Nūr Jahān, on the other hand, did not like the idea, since she could not hope to retain her present position and influence under a dominating personality like that of Prince Khurram. She therefore wanted Shahryār, the youngest son of Jahāngīr, to succeed his father, and for this purpose married her daughter by her former husband[11] to this docile prince, whom she could use as her tool. This policy of Nūr Jahān resulted in the revolt of Prince Khurram, who was, however, soon subdued by the help of a powerful amir, Mahābat Khān, governor of Kābul. The latter himself soon afterwards roused Nūr Jahān's suspicions, and was ordered to present himself before the emperor, who was then on his way to Kābul. Mahābat Khān had to obey the royal behest, but succeeded in capturing the emperor on the bank of the river Jhelum through a surprise attack on his camp by a picked force of Rājputs. Nūr Jahān, who had escaped capture, rallied the emperor's royal troops, and made a bold, though vain, bid to set him free. She led an attack against the disgruntled governor personally, riding on an elephant, which she boldly drove into the swollen river; but her followers were routed by Mahābat Khān, and she was also captured. Yet her womanly tact succeeded where military strategy had failed, and she soon contrived to set herself and her husband free. Jahāngīr, however, did not survive this episode long. His powerful physique, enfeebled by indulgence in wine in his younger days[12] was declining rapidly, and he died on the way from Kāshmīr to Lahore in 1627. He was laid to rest in a garden at Lahore planted by Nūr Jahān, and his tomb at Shāhdarā, a suburb of Lahore, is a fine example of Mughal architecture.

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[10] He is said to have declared that he had sold the kingdom to Nūr Jahān for a flask of wine and a couple of *cabobs*.

[11] Her name was Lādlī Begum.

Nūr Jahān's life, after the demise of her loving husband, was spent in quiet solitude, lighted up only by the memories of her past glory. Shāh Jahān, the new emperor, treated her kindly enough, but she had now lost all interest in life. She lived to the advanced age of seventy-two, dying in 1646, nineteen years after her husband. A sadly neglected, unpretentious dome now covers her mortal remains, standing not far from Jahāngīr's splendid mausoleum and bearing the pathetic inscription:

> "On our lone grave no roses bloom,
> No nightingale would sing!
> No friendly lamp dispels the gloom,
> No moth e'er burns its wing!"

But she lives in the memory of millions of Indian men and women not only as a great queen, but more as a woman of extraordinary charm, who could sway the hearts of the highest and mightiest of her contemporaries.

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[12] Nūr Jahān after her marriage with the emperor had succeeded in imposing a certain measure of restraint upon him.

Jahān Ārā Begum: Jahān Ārā (1613-83) was the daughter of Emperor Shāh Jahān and Mumtāz Mahal, and on her mother's death succeeded to her vast fortunes. This gifted princess, who had the unique distinction of being called Begum Sāhib (the Begum *par excellence*), was possessed of a rare beauty combined with rich intellectual talents, and her influence on her father was unbounded. Jahān Ārā's life was mostly spent in devoted service to his disconsolate father and ambitious brothers, but she was not unmindful of the welfare of poor people, and the larger portion of her huge income was reserved for providing dowries to indigent maidens and pensions and allowances to other needy persons. Like her brother Dārā Shukūh, she had a deep strain of mysticism in her character, and had imbibed from her early life a passionate and abiding love for the Chishtiya saints of India,[13] specially Khwāja Mu'inuddīn, to whose sanctuary at Ajmer she added a large and beautifully decorated hall. She also wrote biographical notices on the saint and his successors, which were collected under the title of *Mūnis al-Arwāh* (The Companion of the Souls), and became very popular. Like several other Mughal princesses, Jahān Ārā remained unmarried, but she was very fond of children and had adopted Dārā Shukūh's daughter, Jahān Zīb Begum, whom she married with great pomp to Auraṅgzeb's son Prince A'zam. In 1644 A.D., during the celebration of her thirty-first birthday, her highly perfumed clothes caught fire from a candle, and she was very badly burnt, which made Shāh Jahān extremely anxious. Her father's love for her and her filial devotion to him form indeed a remarkable chapter in Mughal history.

When her brothers fell out, her sympathies were naturally with the eldest one, Dārā Shukūh, and she tried her utmost to dissuade Auraṅgzeb from defying his father and ousting his elder brother from his rightful place. But she failed, and Auraṅgzeb succeeded in gaining the throne and confining his aged father in the Āgrā fort. Though he kindly gave Jahān Ārā the honorific title of Bādshāh Begum and a *jāgīr* (present of land) with an annual income of rupees seventeen lakhs, yet she completely cut herself off from court life and shared the confinement of her loving father with steadfast loyalty. Shāh Jahān died in 1666 A.D., and she followed him to the grave sixteen years later at the age of seventy. She left property worth three crores of rupees, all of which she bequeathed to Khwāja Mu'inuddīn's sanctuary, but Auraṅgzeb permitted only one crore to be spent according to her desire, since, he argued, legally a bequest could be made only up to one-third of one's property. She was buried in the small, but beautiful tomb-chamber, made of polished white marble with delicately carved lattice-work, which she had built herself in the sanctuary of Hazrat Nizāmuddīn Auliyā in Delhi, and there she lies, one of the most beautiful and accomplished princesses of India, with the green grass covering her grave, and many a visitor is moved by the striking epitaph inscribed above the tomb entrance:

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[13] This is testified by the epitaph on her tomb.

> "Let naught but green grass cover my grave;
> For mortals poor 'tis a grave-cover brave!"

Jahān Ārā, like her father, was very fond of building edifices and laying out beautiful gardens. The most remarkable among her buildings is the Jāmi' Masjid of Āgrā. Another mosque, known as the mosque of Mullā Badakhshī, was built by her in Kāshmīr, while several gardens in Delhi and Āgrā owed their origin to her fine taste.[14]

Zībunnisā: The last of a long line of illustrious Mughal princesses, Zībunnisā, the gifted daughter of Auraṅgzeb, yielded the palm to none of her famous predecessors either in physical charm or intellectual accomplishments, nay, surpassed most of them in her taste for literature and patronage of poets and scholars. Early in life she made wonderfully rapid progress with her studies, memorizing whole of the Koran at a comparatively tender age.[15] Later she acquired great proficiency in the Arabic and Persian languages and several important branches of learning. She also gained considerable skill in calligraphy. Her love for Persian poetry is well known, and she wrote elegant verses full of a rare pathos under the pen-name of Makhfī (the concealed one). Her poems have been collected and have acquired wide celebrity under the title of *Dīwān-i-Makhfī.*[16] Several distinguished scholars of her time wrote and flourished under her patronage and dedicated their works to her. She had a large private library containing beautiful and richly illuminated copies of important literary works, and spent most of her time in the quiet pursuit of knowledge. Forced to remain a spinster by the peculiar tradition of her family, Zībunnisā lived a pious and spotlessly clean life, and there is absolutely no foundation for the scandalous stories that have been set in circulation about her.

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[14] One of them, known as Begum kā Bāgh, lay near Chāndnī Chowk. For a detailed account of Jahān Ārā's career see *The Life of a Moghul Princess* by A. Butenschon.

[15] The occasion was celebrated with great splendour. Auraṅgzeb held a special durbar to mark it and gave her a present of thirty thousand gold mohurs. It is significant that the epithet *hāfiz* (one who knows the Koran by heart) is prefixed to her name in the epitaph occurring in one of her supposed tombs.

Zībunnisā died in A.D. 1701-2, in the lifetime of her father, but her burial-place has never been correctly located.

3. Religious Women

Bībī Fātima Sām: While ambitious nobles and princes fought and conspired for political power in the Sultānate of Delhi, a group of selfless workers, men and women, strove quietly but fearlessly for the spiritual salvation of the masses, and their monasteries purified the minds of the populace tainted by the corrupting influence of the princely courts. Among the saintly women of this age, Bībī Fātima Sām occupies a prominent place and finds frequent mention in the recorded sayings of the well known saint Nizāmuddīn Auliyā of Delhi and his pupils. She was the adopted sister of the two pious brothers, Farīduddīn Ganjshakar and Najībuddīn al-Mutawakkil. She was also a poetess and composed fairly good Persian verses. One of her couplets, quoted by the author of the *Akhbār al-Akhyār,* says: "You seek love, and at the same time you seek life. You want to have both together, but you can never get them."[17] She specially emphasized the importance of charity, and is reported to have declared: "On him who gives to some one a piece of bread and a glass of water, they would shower a thousand blessings, mundane and spiritual, which one could not get for ten thousand prayers and fastings." She lies buried in an unknown spot near the one-time *nakhās* (cattle market) of old Delhi and was popularly known as Bībī Shām or Bībī Sā'ima. Nizāmuddīn Auliyā met her and spoke highly of her virtuous character.

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[16] Her authorship of this collection has sometimes been doubted, but there is really no reason why it should not be considered genuine.

[17] 'Abdul Haqq, *Akhbār al-Akhyār* (Delhi, 1332 H.), pp. 295-6.

Bībī Zalīkhā: It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of the share Bībī Zalīkhā[18] had in the training of her famous son, Nizāmuddīn Auliyā. Living in poverty in a small, unpretentious house in Budāon,[19] she devoted herself to the education of her orphan child and suffered all sorts of hardship to provide him with the comforts of life. There is a touching story which reveals on the one hand her boundless affection for her son and on the other the latter's implicit faith and confidence in her spiritual powers. When Qutbuddīn Mubārak Shāh, the wayward and ill-starred son and successor of 'Alā'uddīn Khaljī, conceived a bitter grudge against Nizāmuddīn Auliyā for his spirit of independence, he once declared in great wrath that if Nizāmuddīn did not attend his court on the first night of the following month, he would make him come there as he knew how to. Now the saint was in the habit of visiting his mother after seeing the new moon every month and placing his head on her feet as a token of filial regard, and when he heard of the king's threat, he felt sure that the next moon would be the last he would live to behold. When, therefore, the dreaded moon appeared, he went to his mother, bowed his head to her feet and said, "I may never again have the pleasure of kissing your feet." She, however, comforted him, and it so happened that the misguided king was himself murdered that very night, before he could lay hands upon the saint.

Next month, Nizāmuddīn again went to his mother, and she in her turn asked him, "On whose feet will you lay your head next month?" The saint at once saw that she was referring to her impending death, and his heart was filled with anguish. "To whose care do you confide me?" he asked. "Pass the night in your brother's house," replied she, "and come to me tomorrow morning, when I shall answer your question." The saint obeyed her command, and having passed a restless night, went to her bed-side in the early morning. "Give me your right hand," she commanded, and when the saint had done so, she clasped his hand in her own feeble one and exclaimed: "O Lord, I confide him to Thy care!" Saying this she breathed her last and it was the memory of those parting words which sustained and succoured the saint in many a perilous situation. She was buried

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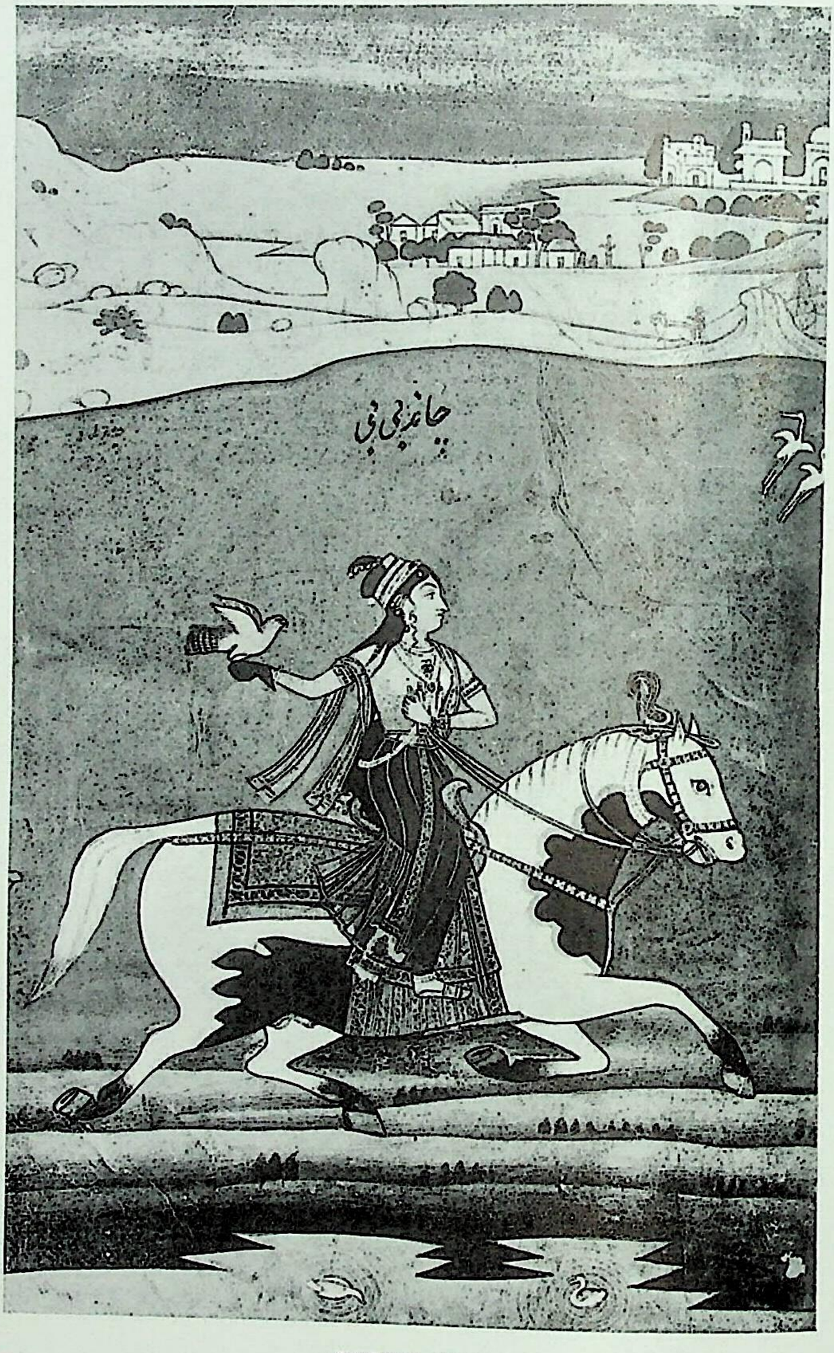
[18] *Ibid.* pp. 297-8.

[19] Mother and son later moved to Delhi.



CHĀND BĪBĪ
Courtesy: O. C. Gangoly

at Ghayāthpur in Delhi, in the house of her son, Najībuddīn al-Mutawakkil.

4. HEROIC WOMEN

Chānd Bībī: Chānd Bībī (1547-99 A.D.) decidedly holds the foremost place among the Muslim women of India living in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Daughter of Husain Nizām Shāh of Ahmadnagar, she was born there in 1547 and was married to 'Alī 'Ādil Shāh of Bijāpur when the two rival Deccani kingdoms united for a time against Vijayanagar. Chānd Bībī, who had received the fortress of Sholāpur as part of her dowry, proved a great blessing to her husband, who, recognizing her rich talents, consulted her in all administrative matters. She used to ride with him on horseback, to review the army parades and take an active part in his military campaigns, and when in 1580 her husband was treacherously murdered by a eunuch, and his nephew Ibrāhīm 'Ādil Shāh, a minor, succeeded him to the throne of Bijāpur, she became the regent and the real ruler of his kingdom. Kamīl Khān, a Deccani amir, now held the post of minister, and for a time Chānd Bībī had ample opportunity to busy herself with the improvement of the state administration and the education of the boy-king, which she did with great tact and ability.

Soon afterwards, however, Kamīl Khān became jealous of Chānd Bībī's influence and started treating her with discourtesy and arrogance, so that she was compelled to set him aside. She accomplished this by the help of another amir, Kishwar Khān,[20] whom she appointed minister, but he also tried to oust Chānd Bībī from her privileged position and to seize all power in his own hands. By a ruse he succeeded in turning some other nobles against her, and she was asked to leave Bijāpur. On her refusal she was dragged out of her apartments with the help of her slave-girls, was put in a palanquin and conveyed hurriedly to the fortress of Sātārā, where she was confined.[21] But the Bijāpur nobles soon repented of this foolish act, and setting free Chānd Bībī, fell upon Kishwar Khān, who fled to Golconḍa and was killed there. Chānd Bībī, now restored to her former position, appointed an Abyssinian amir, Ikhlās Khān by name, as minister.

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[20] *Firishta* (Lucknow Edition), Vol. 2, p. 49.

[21] *Ibid.* p. 51.

She did so presumably to counterbalance the power of the Deccani nobles, but her choice did not prove a happy one, for he also resented Chānd Bībī's partiality to foreigners, specially Afzal Khān Shīrāzī, and managed by surreptitious means to put him and the brahmin minister Paṇḍit Rāsū to death. This naturally enraged Chānd Bībī, who imprisoned him with the help of 'Ainul Mulk. He was, however, later released, and distinguished himself in several battles against the Qutb Shāhīs of Golconḍa.

In spite of the best efforts of Chānd Bībī, the affairs in Bijāpur and Ahmadnagar continued to go from bad to worse, owing mostly to the mutual jealousies and rivalry of the Deccani and Abyssynian amirs, and the climax was reached when Ibrāhīm Nizām Shāh, king of Ahmadnagar, was killed, and Miān Manjhū, an ambitious amir, defying the wishes of Chānd Bībī, set up a young prince, Ahmad Shāh, on the throne. Chānd Bībī now left for Bijāpur in disgust. Manjhū, feeling his position to be insecure, appealed to Prince Murād for help, and the latter, marching from his ḥeadquarters in Gujarāt, promptly appeared before the walls of Ahmadnagar with a large army. Manjhū now realized his mistake and he entreated Chānd Bībī to return to Ahmadnagar and rescue it from the Mughal menace, and, in spite of her advanced age and feeble health, she hurried to defend her homeland.

The ensuing months form the most glorious period of Chānd Bībī's heroic career, for she managed to keep Prince Murād and his redoubtable general Khān-i-Khānān at bay, and finally compelled them to raise the siege. Once, when a portion of the rampart was blown away by mines laid by the besiegers, she rushed out of her palace barefooted with a number of trusted followers, a veil on her face and a naked sword in her hand, and rallying her men succeeded in repairing the damaged wall overnight. Prince Murād was so deeply impressed by her courage that he gave her the title of Chānd Sultān and, accepting the province of Berār as the prize of his campaign, left Ahmadnagar. But the internal strife in Ahmadnagar continued, so that Akbar, who was himself camping in Burhānpur, soon found an opportunity to send another expedition to the unfortunate kingdom, under his son Dāniyāl and Khān-i-Khānān. Chānd Bībī realized that it was impossible to hold out against the mighty army that now surrounded her beloved city, and wanted to conclude an honourable peace with Prince Dāniyāl, but the impetuous eunuch Jīta Khān,[22] to whom she confided her plans, accused her of treachery and rousing the Deccani amirs against her, had her seized and executed. This was in 1599. Thus perished one of the noblest daughters of India at the hands of her own ungrateful people, for whom she had done so much and sacrificed so much. They had to pay dearly for this deed of wanton cruelty, for the kingdom of Ahmadnagar now became a part of the Mughal empire, and its past glory was laid in dust. It was well, perhaps, that she did not live to see that disgraceful day.

Lavish tributes have been paid to Chānd Bībī by successive generations of India's historians, and there can be no doubt that she deserved them fully. In addition to her military genius and administrative skill, she was a good scholar of Arabic and Persian and could speak several Deccani languages fluently. She was, moreover, a great patron of scholars and was specially kind to those foreigners who came to seek their fortune in India. Although her end was tragic it was not shorn of that greatness which she had enjoyed in her lifetime, and the only real sorrow in her life was the fact that she had no child of her own.[23]

Sāhibjī: 'Sāhibjī' was the popular name of a daughter of 'Alī Mardān Khān, who was a distinguished amir of Shāh Jahān's reign and held the important governorships of Lahore and Kāshmīr. Her husband Amīr Khān was appointed governor of Kābul by the Mughal emperor Auraṅgzeb in 1678 A.D., when that province was passing through a period of rebellions and serious disturbances.

Adopting a firm but conciliatory policy, he soon subdued the truculent Afghāns so completely that there was hardly any trouble during his long governorship of over twenty years. And much of his remarkable success was certainly due to the steadfast loyalty of his wife Sāhibjī. She was his constant companion and advised him in all important matters with rare sagacity and forethought. When Amīr Khān passed away, the emperor became very anxious for the safety of the north-west provinces. But one of his confidants, Arshad Khān, said to him, "Maybe he is dead, sire, but Sāhibjī is alive, and government is as safe in her hands as in those of her husband." And pending the arrival of Prince Shāh 'Ālam to take over charge, she handled the delicate situation with great wisdom.

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[22] Firishta. Other historians give his name as Hamīd Khān.

[23] For a very beautifully written tribute to her memory see Mrs. Annie Besant's "A Warrior Queen" in *The Children of the Motherland* (Banaras Hindu University).

When Amīr Khān died, the bulk of his troops were scattered in the hilly districts inhabited by the most turbulent Afghān tribes who could have at any time exterminated them. The first difficult task before Sāhibjī, therefore, was to extricate the beleaguered troops safely, and this she accomplished successfully. She concealed for some time the death of her husband, and dressing up another man who resembled him in his clothes and seating him in a glazed palanquin, she proceeded slowly and carefully to lead the troops out of the dangerous hills. The Afghān chiefs came and paid homage to the palanquin, which they believed was occupied by their redoubtable governor, and were handsomely treated by Sāhibjī till the plains were reached in safety. It was then that she proclaimed the news of her husband's demise, and held a reception for the Afghān amirs who came to offer condolence.

On this occasion she showed her boldness in a most impressive manner, for addressing them she said, "If you remain loyal to the emperor, all your pensions and privileges shall remain as before; but if you want to break your word, let us decide the issue now and here! I am ready to match my strength against yours, and if I win, this heroic deed of mine will pass on to posterity." And the Afghāns bowed their heads before this womanly challenge, since they knew well enough that it was no child's play to fight this determined woman. For two years Sāhibjī successfully maintained peace and order in Afghānistān, and when, finally relieved of her onerous duty, she reached the imperial court at Burhānpur, Auraṅgzeb loaded her with kindness. Her stepsons, whom she presented to the emperor,[24] were granted high offices, while she herself was permitted to proceed on a pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. She was received there with great honour by the Sharīf of Mecca and other Arab notables, and spent large sums in charity during her stay there. She later returned to India and passed the last few days of her life in pious devotion.

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[24] She had no child of her own.

CHAPTER XXII

GREAT INDIAN WOMEN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. Queens

Gaurī Pārvatī Bāī: For about twenty years between 1810 and 1829 A.D., Travancore was ruled by two Rānīs in succession. Gaurī Lakṣhmī Bāī (A.D. 1791-1814), who ruled from 1810 to 1814, had the benefit of the advice of Col. Munro, who was both Resident in the State and the Rānī's chief minister. Her reign marks a great step in the modernization of the administration of Travancore.

Gaurī Pārvatī, born in 1802, was about thirteen years old when she was called upon in 1814 to assume the reins of government. Though outwardly of a mild and kindly disposition, she was remarkably shrewd and resourceful. In one of his dispatches, Resident Munro paid a handsome tribute to "her intelligence and liberal and ingenuous mind."

During her reign the frontiers of Travancore were extended by the addition of the principalities of Eḍapaḷḷi, Punjar and Panthalam. Her government carried out a revenue settlement. The abolition of export duties on gram gave considerable relief to the cultivators.

She was very tolerant towards the Christian missions and gave them facilities to build churches and schools. She was, however, careful to enforce on them due obedience to the laws of the land. Thus, she resolutely put down all tendencies on their part to usurp civil and criminal jurisdiction in their parishes, or to exercise any control over their flock other than purely spiritual. In an edict she reminded them that "the very root of the Christian religion was humility and respect for constituted authority."

Her remarkable achievement lay in the field of social reform. She ensured equality of treatment to high and low, and stopped certain official exactions. Rules were framed for the conduct of government officials, and rank afforded no immunity. Medieval social restrictions of a harassing nature were done away with. To give some examples: all her subjects, however humble, could wear gold and silver ornaments and build tiled houses—privileges hitherto the monopoly of the aristocracy. She abolished all forms of poll-tax. When she saw that rich Nambūdiri families got impoverished and alienated *brahmaswam*[1] lands to pay heavy dowries to get their daughters married, she issued a proclamation that marriage dowries should not exceed 700 *paṇams* (roughly a hundred rupees).

The young Rānī realized that social amelioration was not possible unless the people were literate. She was the first ruler of Travancore, and perhaps one of the first among the rulers in India, to spend considerable sums on education with a definite plan to bring it within the reach of all in the State. Her plan was followed and augmented by successive rulers of the State. If today Travancore leads the rest of India in the percentage of literate people, it is largely due to the initiative of Rānī Gaurī Pārvatī in the twenties of the last century.

At the age of twenty-seven, Gaurī Pārvatī invested her nephew Rāma Varma Swāti Tirunāḷ with ruling powers, and retired, in 1829, into private life; but her nephew often sought her advice and guidance on all important matters of state.

Rānī Lakṣhmī Bāī: The nineteenth century in India was an epoch of upheaval in its first and of reconstruction in its second phase. The character and talent of Indian women were accordingly markedly divergent in the two periods. Rising head and shoulders over other women in the first epoch was Rānī Lakṣhmī Bāī of Jhānsī (1835-58). She was born on the 18th November, 1835 at Banāras and was married early to Subāhdār Gaṅgādhar Rāo, head of the small Marāṭhā State of Jhānsī formed by the Peshwās in 1743. The subahdar died without issue in 1853, and his widow Lakṣhmī Bāī was not permitted by the Governor-General-in-Council to adopt a successor. John Lang, whom she engaged as her lawyer for appeal to the directors of the Company in England against the decision of the Governor-General-in-Council, described her thus: "She was a woman of about the middle size—rather stout, but not too stout. Her face must have been very handsome when she was young, and even now it had many charms—though according to my idea

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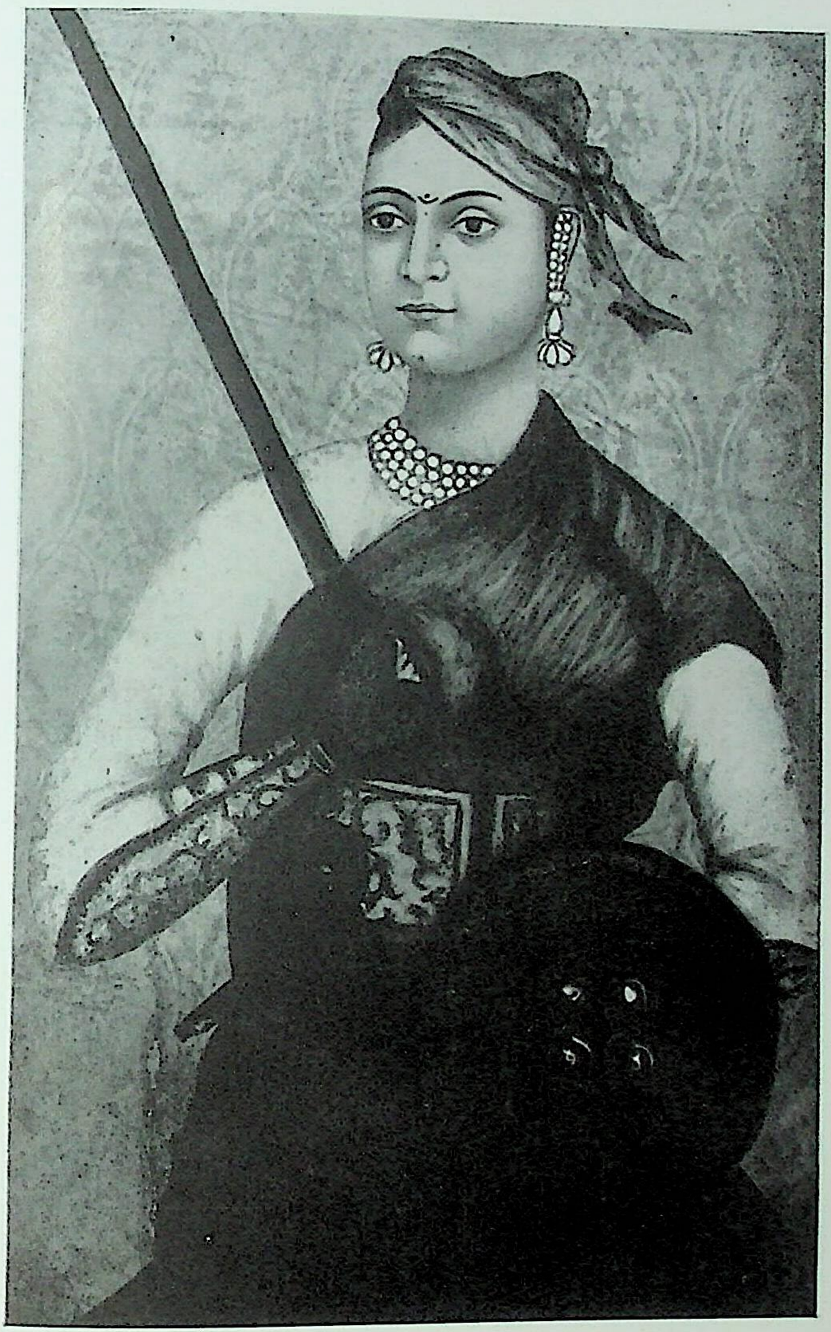
[1] Lands gifted to the Brāhmaṇas to be enjoyed in perpetuity.



RĀNĪ LAKṢHMĪ BĀĪ

of beauty, it was too round. The expression also was very good and very intelligent. The eyes were particularly fine, and the nose very delicately shaped."

The appeal was in vain and Jhānsī was annexed to the British administration. The Rānī, who was given a small pension of rupees five thousand per mensem, too small to maintain the old retainers of the State, could not reconcile herself to the ignominy and dependence. All her life henceforth centred upon her resolve, "I will not give up my Jhānsī," which seemed rather futile in the period of consolidation of the British power. But soon the Rānī had an opportunity as a true-born Marāṭhā princess to fight the British.

The rebellion began in India with the rise of the sepoys against their British officers at Meerut and Delhi on the 10th May, 1857. Gradually it spread to other parts of northern India. On the 5th June, 1857, the rebellion broke out at Jhānsī, and on the 9th June the Rānī of Jhānsī's authority was proclaimed throughout her State. From this date to the 4th April, 1858, the Rānī stoutly defended the fort of Jhānsī against Sir Hugh Rose. Ultimately, finding her position exceedingly precarious, she made her adventurous escape from the fort through the cordon of British troops and bravely fought against the British in Bundelkhaṇḍ from Kunch to Kālpī. At Kunch the Rānī joined the indomitable Tāntiā Topī. Then began a strenuous period of recruiting soldiers, men from Oudh and the Doāb, for the struggle, the Rājputs and Brāhmaṇas constituting the infantry, and the Rohillas and other Muslims comprising the cavalry. The Rānī smilingly suffered privations along with the soldiers and personally took part in the fight. "It was the Rānī of Jhānsī's custom," states her own personal servant to Major S. C. McPherson, the political agent at Gwālior, "to lead her troops dressed in military uniform of the irregular cavalry—a crimson jacket, crimson trousers and a white turban, which made it impossible to tell her sex." On the 23rd May, 1858, after a hard-fought struggle, General Rose captured Kālpī on the river Yamunā about a hundred miles east of Gwālior. The Rānī of Jhānsī and Tāntiā Topī fled to the jungle. General Rose thought that the rebellion was over and actually issued orders for disbanding the troops under his command.

At this juncture, the Rānī of Jhānsī and Tāntiā Topī astounded the British and their supporters in central and northern India by suddenly capturing the famous fort of Gwālior with its large store of arms and ammunition on the 4th June, 1858, in the hottest part of the summer season. The Maharaja of Gwālior had to flee from the fort, and most of his troops came over to the side of the Rānī. General Rose thus reviewed the change in the military situation in central India: "The high descent of the Ranee, her unbounded liberality to her troops and retainers and her fortitude, which no reverses could shake, rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary. The rebel army was composed of the Gwālior Contingent, the finest men, best drilled and organized native troops of all arms in India."

General Rose reached Morār on the fringe of Gwālior fort on the 16th of June. The cantonments were captured and the stores and ammunition seized. The next day the British force crossed the Morār-Gwālior road at Phūlbāgh and attacked Rānī's cavalry. There she was personally directing the batteries against the advancing British troops, who were equipped with efficient breech-loading carbines, against which the swords and clumsy old muzzle-loaders of the Indian troops were no match. Then the British cavalry that had fought at Balaclava charged against the Rānī of Jhānsī's troops. The Rānī fought valiantly, but was killed in the battle. The fight is described by a personal witness: "In the afternoon of 17th June, she was seated together with a female favourite of her late husband, who never left her-side and dressed like her, near the Phūlbāgh batteries, drinking sherbet with four hundred troopers of the Fifth Irregular Horse near them, when the alarm was given that the British cavalry had crossed the Morār-Gwālior road and was attacking from the south. Some forty or fifty horsemen of the Eighth Irish Hussars came up firing their breech-loading carbines from the saddle and charging sword in hand. All the sepoy troopers there fled away except only fifteen who stayed with her. Her horse refused to leap the canal, when she received a bullet in the side and immediately after a Hussar gave her a cut on the head. But she rode off, and a moment later fell down dead. Her servants burnt her body by placing it on a huge pile of hay in a garden close by and setting it on fire." Thus died the queen far away from her home and kinsmen in the thick of battle, overpowered both by numbers and superiority of arms.

Mahārānī Kempanañjammaṇṇi Avaru: In the year 1894, a great calamity overtook the State of Mysore: the ruler Chāmarāja Woḍeyar X died suddenly of a serious illness on the 28th December, his eldest child then being a boy of only ten years. It was at this critical juncture that his queen Mahārānī Kempanañjammaṇṇi (A.D. 1866-1935) showed promise of great administrative ability. During the minority of the heir, she was the regent, and with the assistance of the able chief minister, Sir Seshadri Ayyar, she ruled the State very ably for a period of eight years.

The Mahārānī was a ruler who had great intelligence and tact. It was during her regime that a number of useful measures were introduced. Mention may be made of the construction of the Mārīkaṇive reservoir, the establishment of a college for women, called the Maharani's College, and the construction of excellent hostels for students, both at Bangalore and Mysore. Further, a liberal monetary grant and a large extent of land were given for the starting of the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore. Another of her noteworthy achievements was the successful implementation of the hydro-electric scheme at Sivasamudram, the first of its kind in India.

To show how great a lady she was, we may quote the words of Lord Curzon when her regency came to an end: "I have pleasure in stating that the smooth progress of events during the minority (of Kṛishṇarāja Woḍeyar IV) has been largely due to the unfailing tact and discretion of Her Highness. . . . She has set an example of public and domestic virtue, which has been of equal value to her people and to her family, and which has earned for her the admiration and the respect of all. . . . In recognition of these services, I had submitted to His Majesty the King Emperor the request that he would allow Her Highness the salute of nineteen guns to be continued to her for life. . . . His Majesty has gladly consented to bestow upon Her Highness this exceptional mark of favour."

2. Writers and Social Reformers

Toru Dutt: Toru Dutt (1856-77), the youngest child of Govin Chunder Dutt of the famous Dutt family of Rāmbāgān, Calcutta, was not only a literary celebrity of the nineteenth-century India but was also one of the best products of the impact of Western culture and civilization on the then inert and bewildered East. Born in a rich family noted for its catholic culture and high moral and devotional tone, Govin, a brilliant writer of English prose and verse, added to his heritage a wider Western outlook and a genuine reverence for Jesus Christ, into whose fold the five brothers and a cousin, together with their families, took shelter. If Toru was a born genius, her upbringing under the loving guidance of such a personality cannot be ignored. It is not for nothing that the girl gratefully wrote, "I wonder what I should have been without my father."

Toru's early education, though in Calcutta, was entirely English, so much so that she never learnt how to spell her simple name in Bengali correctly. But her knowledge of the English language and literature and, through it, of European arts and social customs was amazing even to cultured English friends of her father in England. Before she left for that country, that is, when she was hardly fourteen, she had known Shakespeare and read *Paradise Lost* thoroughly. She was an assiduous reader of novels throughout her life and learnt a little French and German too. She spent four years in England and France—in the latter just a few months, joining a French school at Nice. Nevertheless, so intimately did she identify herself with everything that was French that "French became her favourite language and France the country of her election" for ever in life.

But it was in England, especially at Cambridge, that she betook herself to a serious study not only of the English and French languages but also of the life and thought of the two countries. Her father engaged good teachers and governesses to teach his daughters languages, especially French, and European music and painting, and himself became their co-student. He invited his friends, who were men of letters and social eminence, to his house, and introducing them to the daughters, engaged them in literary criticism, in which Toru shone marvellously. He also used to take them to places associated with the lives of great writers and makers of history, museums, libraries, etc. It was at Cambridge that she started translating French poems into English, some of which were to find a place in the *Sheaf*.

During the last quarter of 1873, the Dutts returned to Calcutta. This, however, made no difference in Toru's literary life, though she pined to go back to Europe and breathe its free social atmosphere.

The remaining four years of her life were marked by the same zealous study of the English and French literature, to which now was added Sanskrit. Insatiable though her avidity of study remained, she now directed her energies mainly to completing the books, especially *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, that she had undertaken. Family mishap, her own periodical illness, the humid climate of Calcutta and its suburbs—nothing could deter her from continuing her self-imposed work to a finish. And to her great joy, her *Sheaf* was published in 1876 and was very well received both in India and England. It would have gone quite unnoticed, had it not fallen by chance into the hands of the two famous critics of France and England, André Theuriet and Edmund Gosse, the latter writing, "What was my surprise and almost rapture to open at such verse as this! . . . When poetry is as good as this, it does not much matter whether Rouveyre prints it upon Whatman paper or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore." Later Toru translated about sixty new poems for it, and the posthumous third edition published by Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. was very tasteful and attracted a wider circle of readers. Her two novels, one in English, unfinished (maybe abandoned by herself), and another in French, and all her other poems, many of which were original, at least in execution if not in thought, collected under the title of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan,* were published by the bereaved father in commemoration of his darling child. These are all that we get to judge the nature and quality of Toru's wonderful poetic genius, which remained more as a promise than a fulfilment—her life having been cut short by premature death at twenty-one. Her letters to Miss Mary Martin of Cambridge supply many details of her pure and sweet personality and the development of her scholarship.

Edmund Gosse speaks of Toru's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* thus: It "is certainly the most imperfect of Toru's writings, but it is not the least interesting. It is a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness, of genius overriding great obstacles and of talent succumbing to ignorance and inexperience. That it should have been performed at all is so extraordinary that we forget to be surprised at its inequality. The English verse is sometimes exquisite; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored. ... On the whole, the attainment of the book was simply astounding."

Coming as it does from the pen of Gosse, it should be taken as the final word on the book. And yet the *Sheaf* was 'the most imperfect' of her writings. For her perfect poems, however, we are to come to her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, where the defects of prosody and deficiency in scholarship were greatly overcome; and the muse, now freed from the trammels of translation, came out in a gorgeous form. These poems, according to Gosse, "will be ultimately found to constitute Toru's chief lagacy to posterity."

In her French novel she was equally successful, as is shown by the remark of the great French scholar, James Darmesteter, who speaks of it as the work of "a young Hindu girl of nineteen, who had learnt French for a very few years, and had resided in France for a few months only. It is an extraordinary feat, without precedent. The *Vathek* of Beckford can alone be compared to it, though such comparison is hardly fair, because, to a gentleman of the eighteenth century, the French language was, so to speak, a second 'mother-tongue.'" Madame de Saffray, herself a poet, writes, "This one surpasses all the prodigies. She is a Frenchwoman in this book, and a Frenchwoman like ourselves: she thinks, she writes, like one of us."

There stands out Toru Dutt as a pride of the nineteenth-century India, illuminating her literary galaxy. But she is much more than that. She is a perfect fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of noble English souls who came out to India with a genuine desire to help this unhappy land of promise to reach her destined greatness, and also a sure warning against the futile attempt of grafting an alien culture and civilization on a land grossly misunderstood. We cannot think of a greater fulfilment than in her of the high moral qualities, of the unshakable faith in Jesus, of the intellectual attainments of Europe's best minus her sciences. She is also a warning. All her brilliant achievements notwithstanding, will she get an honourable place in the gallery of great men and women of any country—either in France or in England? India hugs her to her bosom no doubt, but finds nothing to show as hers, India's. This would have been the fate of our country as a whole, had she

PAṆḌITĀ RAMĀBĀĪ
Courtesy : Y. M. C. A., Calcutta

not manifested her own genius. Here is our abiding interest in this great daughter of India, holy as a white lotus, sweet as a rose, who was oblivious of the soul that produced her and enjoyed the beauty of the sky and air, redolent of myrrh instead of the *tulasī*.[2]

Paṇḍitā Ramābāī: Of the many great souls the nineteenth-century India produced, Paṇḍitā Ramābāī must be counted as one. When she was born in 1858, her father Anant Shāstrī Dongre, a reputed Sanskrit scholar, cast out by society for teaching Sanskrit to his wife Lakṣhmībāī against the established social convention, had long taken refuge in the Gaṅgāmūla forest, thirty miles off Mangalore, and there built a cottage, round which had soon grown up a *chatuṣhpāṭhī* (Sanskrit school). But through the machinations of wily relatives he, together with his faithful wife and three children, including Ramābāī, then a babe of a few months, had to leave this retreat of peace and become a lifelong pilgrim.

Thus began the fateful period of Ramābāī's travels, which made her what she was. Sitting in her mother's lap, she got by heart Pāṇini's aphorisms and thousands of verses of the *Bhāgavata* and on good counsel. In her teens she mastered Marāṭhī and acquired that wonderful proficiency in speaking Sanskrit which stood her in good stead in later life. Afterwards she extended the width of her studies in many directions.

Wherever Anant Shāstrī went, his scholarship and saintly life attracted the admiration of the local people, who reverentially supplied the few needs of the stoical family. Terribly orthodox in other matters, he would soon antagonize his admirers by his uncompromising attitude towards the education and the marriageable age of girls; and the family, denied food and shelter and made the target of wild talks, would be compelled to trek to another holy place. Thus driven from post to pillar, and meeting fortune and misfortune in quick succession for more than two decades the family developed characters and attitudes that verged on saintliness.

Her mother's fortitude, skill in household matters and total self-abnegation made a deep impression on Ramābāī's soft mind. But the persistent social persecution that ultimately led to the death of her parents and elder sister under most tragic circumstances in the course of a few months, though reinforced by the famine of 1874, steeled her heart against the Hindu religion and society, neither of which she could ever forgive.

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[2] For the above facts and quotations we are indebted to the very able biography of our poet, *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* by Harihar Das.

Ramā inherited most of her religious attitudes and tendencies from her father, who thought that the strict observance of rituals would bring him to the desired goal of the "vision beatific." This infection spread in the family. The pilgrimage started by the father was carried on with the same rigour by Ramā and her brother Shrīnivās, which brought them to death's door in the Punjab, where they almost succumbed to cold.

Ramā, accompanied by her brother, came in 1878 to Calcutta, where, the reform movements having already been started, her criticism of Hinduism was acclaimed by the heterodox elements, while her fluency in speaking Sanskrit and knowledge of Sanskrit scriptures endeared her to the pandits, who, as a recognition of her scholarship conferred on her the titles of *Paṇḍitā* and *Saraswatī*. This woke her up to her worth and to what she considered to be her mission, viz. educating the high-caste Hindu women and thereby emancipating them from the thraldom of social injustice and tyranny. She went on lecturing tours to various towns of Bengal and Assam. Her name spread throughout India ; even Mahārāṣhṭra did not lag behind to honour her. She felt happy.

But that was not to be her fate. Her brother died in 1880, leaving her alone in the world, but after giving her permission to marry Bipin Bihārī Dās Medhāvī, an educated Shūdra, who was the man of her choice. But he, too, was snatched away from her by death in 1882, when, with a new-born daughter, she was at the height of her happiness. Left friendless, with a baby to bring up in addition, and knowing no art or craft whereby to earn money, she felt the need of learning English. In the meantime she had obtained a copy of St. Luke's Gospel from her husband and been very much attracted towards Christianity.

Ramā with her daughter came to Poona, and with the help of Marāṭhā reformers like Rānaḍe and Bhāṇḍārkar started the Ārya Mahilā Samāj to deliver the high-caste Hindu women from ignorance and social, moral and religious evils. Soon she found out that her resources were inadequate to the work she wanted to take up. Meanwhile she continued her contact with the Christian missionaries at and about Poona, which raised hopes in her heart that she would be better fitted for her intended activities if she visited England and got there the kind of education she needed. She, with her daughter, little Manoramā, came to England in 1883 and was well received by the Sisters at Wantage, in Berkshire, who arranged for their education. Ramā heaved a sigh of relief. She was baptized in 1883 in the Wantage Parish Church. After a year's preliminary study of English, she joined the Women's College at Cheltenham, teaching Sanskrit and learning English literature, science and mathematics.

Early in 1886, she went to America. She immediately set herself to learn Froebel's Kindergarten system, and during the vacations went on lecturing tours to various cities in U.S.A. and Canada. Her appeal for help found wonderful response. The Ramābāī Association was founded in December, 1887, as a direct result of the impression that her book, *The High-Caste Hindu Women,* created in U.S.A. Sufficient funds were raised not only to start her intended home and school but also to maintain them for ten years, with further promise, if the work done was found satisfactory.

With high hopes Ramā returned to India, having spent two profitable years in America. When Shāradā Sadan, a boarding house for widows and a school for day-scholars, was started at Bombay in 1889, she was supported by great men like Rānaḍe, Telaṅg, Bhāṇḍārkar and Chandāvarkar. In order to curtail expenses, the Sadan, with eighteen widow inmates, was transferred to Poona in 1890. There it continued its activities in spite of the vehement opposition from the nationalist group headed by B. G. Ṭiḷak, when it became public that a number of inmates had got attracted toward Christianity and been ultimately baptized. The opposition was a rude shock to her, but she carried on her work of service undaunted, and at the end of 1896 there were forty-nine students in the school.

A terrible famine broke out in 1896 in the Central Provinces and central India, and thousands died of starvation and disease. The Paṇḍitā, impelled by an inward urge and unaware of where money would come from, visited the famine areas and collected six hundred unfortunate girls and women, half of whom she kept under her own care. At Keḍgāon, thirty miles away from Poona, she settled a new colony, the Mukti Sadan, keeping the earlier Sadan as a separate entity at Poona under the care of a Christian Sister, Sundrābāī. Very soon a new department was added to the Mukti Sadan. It was a Rescue Home, called the Kṛipā Sadan, which in three years was filled with three hundred. inmates, thus showing the dire need of such a home in the locality.

Having entrusted these newly started activities to able hands, the Paṇḍitā started for America in 1898 to give an account of her activities to the Ramābāī Association at Boston. She returned in August of the same year, and unfettered by non-Christian influences, devoted herself heart and soul to what she felt as Christ's work.

The Shāradā Sadan was now transferred to Keḍgāon to form a part of the larger institution, the Mukti Sadan, but went on imparting higher education to women who were fit for it. She had hardly taken up this work of consolidation when she was called upon by the Lord to extend her field of work beyond her dreams. In 1900 another terrible famine broke out in the province, Gujarāt and Kāṭhiāwāḍ being especially affected. Unable to go herself, she sent to Gujarāt twenty of her Sisters, who brought innumerable "broken lives" and "shattered hopes" and placed them under Ramā's care and supervision. She now had at the Mukti Sadan over nineteen hundred inmates, whose needs had to be supplied, besides over one hundred cattle.

The years from 1900 to 1922, saw her life's end fulfilled in diverse ways. This was the period when her constructive genius shone out most brilliantly, and all her multifarious needs were met in unexpected ways and in proper times. ,Workers and visitors came from all parts of the globe. Above all, she felt in the midst of her numerous activities and their attendant troubles an inward peace and bliss which come to rare spiritual persons. She had it in such abundance that when Manoramā, her only object of earthly love and her ablest assistant and would-be successor, died in 1921, she remained wholly unaffected, much to the surprise of all. She had prayed and prayed till she was convinced of the wrong course she had chosen: she had placed humanity above Christ. Now she had the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Paṇḍitā's outlook and personality were completely changed. She was no longer an Indian or a philanthropist, but a humble servant of Christ, doing

His work. This was the consummation of a number of mystic experiences brought on by constant prayer and ever increasing resignation to her Lord.

It is from this angle of vision that we are to judge her work at the Mukti Sadan. Throughout her long waking hours day after day, she was to be seen everywhere, either supervising or doing the work herself, or helping a worker, or consoling or inspiring another and, above all, praying with the earnestness of an angel for all the inmates, not only for the removal of their physical needs but for their moral and spiritual regeneration also. And everything went on smoothly under Christ's personal care, as it were. To train the high-caste Hindu women, she had a branch of the Shāradā Sadan started by her daughter in 1913 at Gulbarga, in the then Nizām's dominions. Toiling and praying, full of faith and joy, "tired beyond telling," but indefatigable, the Paṇḍitā "slipped away quietly in her sleep as the day broke" on the 5th April, 1922.

Swarṇakumārī Devī: Shrīmatī Swarṇakumārī Devī (1855-1932), the tenth of the fourteen children of the princely, pious Devendranāth Tagore, was another literary talent of the nineteenth century whose extensive contributions to Bengali literature are of permanent interest and of a high order.

From her very childhood she was surrounded by relatives who were all ardent votaries of learning, the elders zealously helping the youngsters to attain a standard of culture befitting their aristocracy. In the study of languages and literatures, Eastern and Western, of music, painting and other fine arts, of history, geography and general sciences, there was, so to say, a regular competition among them not only in storing up varied useful knowledge but also in giving original expression to thoughts and sentiments born of scanning the West with the Eastern telescope. The result was marvellous in quality, quantity and variety. Swarṇakumārī did not lag behind her eminent brothers of superb talents in early selecting her own field of work, and started writing fiction and composing songs even before she was thirteen, and by twenty-one she was a writer of repute. Her first novel in Bengali, *The Light Goes Out,* was in point of thought and style no mean production.

Swarṇakumārī's education began and ended at home under her father's supervision and under the direct guidance of well-chosen old scholars and her elder brothers. The family observed the *purdah*; she was married at thirteen; and being aristocratic, the womenfolk would not visit other houses. So all the circumstances that are generally supposed to go against our women's getting liberal education were present in her case. And yet she got and profited by the best kind of education. With her second Bengali Reader, she was introduced to Sanskrit, English coming in later when, after marriage, she was with her elder brother in Bombay. But she imbibed the true Western spirit through her own study of the English literature, but more so through her contact with her enlightened relatives and acquaintances, whose intellect, however, never prompted them to discard anything simply because it was Indian, and who combined the best of the East and West in their personalities. She got something more from her home atmosphere than a mere intellectual hankering and an urge to give expression to her thoughts and emotions. She imbibed the spirit of actively engaging herself in removing the social disabilities of Hindu women through the formation of women's societies and fairs. She saw that her father's house was not a mere 'Palace of Art' but the Lord's vineyard too, where one was to labour for the Lord's children. In her early days she witnessed her father carrying on social and religious reforms in the family, discarding orthodox forms and ceremonies in favour of the pure religion of the Upaniṣhads and the Sūfīs. All these made a deep impression on her mind, and latterly we find her organizing the *Sakhī-samiti* and connected fairs to improve the economic condition of poor women, especially widows and unmarried girls, and to bring the light of education to the doors of the orthodox Hindu families. The result for her was an easy and natural ascent up the ladder of fame, her innate talent and circumstances helping each other throughout the life.

Swarṇakumārī drove her pen almost incessantly up to the last year of her long life of seventy-seven; and she tried her hand in all kinds of writing—short stories, historical and social novels, dramas, farces, lyrics, songs and poems—with such success that when, in 1921, the President-elect of the nineteenth session of the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Sammilan* (the premier literary society of Bengal), the poet Rabīndranāth Tagore, who was her younger brother, failed to be present, the *élite* of Bengal present on the occasion unanimously voted her to occupy the chair and guide the deliberations. She was a voluminous writer too, as many as twenty-seven volumes standing in her name, not including the text-books she wrote. Before the close of the century her reputation as a lucid and powerful writer was well established. And how did she accept the review of her books? Having been associated with the board of editors of the *Bhāratī* from its very start and contributing liberally to its pages month after month, she had no misgivings about her success as an author.

Her style was charming. Writing chaste Bengali and freely availing herself of her knowledge of Sanskrit on the one hand and of her feminine sense of using homely colloquial words on the other, she introduced into Bengali a style that has not yet been fully appreciated. For fictions and narratives a simpler and more effective style is yet to be evolved for those who prefer not to write colloquial Bengali. She coined words and phrases that remind us of the later days of Rabīndranāth. As a writer she often appears in the role of a reformer, but her sense of humour is so fine that people enjoy the fun without feeling wounded, and she wins her case easily. For obvious reasons her name is limited to Bengal, which has given her an honourable niche in the temple of fame.

Kāminī Roy: Shrīmatī Kāminī Roy (1864-1933), the precocious daughter of Chaṇḍī Charaṇ Sen, himself an author of some note, was a university girl, who made her mark in almost all the examinations up to the degree stage. In the Upper Primary examination she stood first in her Circle, and being a mathematical prodigy got the appellation *Līlāvatī*. After passing the Entrance examination successfully, in the First Arts she occupied the first place in Sanskrit, in which subject she secured second class honours in her degree examination. But this is a poor description of the equipment which she received at home from her father up to her twelfth year and again, off and on, during vacations in school and college. Every morning after prayer he would set her lessons from choice books, including the Bible, till she grew up sufficiently in intellect to utilize the fine library of her father. She had a special aptitude for philosophy, and had plenty of philosophical books to read.

Kāminī's father was a Brahmo of Keshub Chandra Sen's school, and it was this that taught her to look upon man as man in the light of Christ's personality and yet saved her from being uprooted from her social and religious traditions. She remained a Hindu, but was enriched by the Christian charity and joyous view of life. Her father presented her the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* when he first came to know of her poetic talents at the age of eight. Another important factor that contributed powerfully to the building up of her character and temperament was her innate regard for Sanskrit, which impelled her to exchange it for her favourite subject, mathematics.

Her father would remind her not to forget that her life had a mission. But she could decide about it only when she became a teacher in 1886. From then on she turned her whole attention to the muse, and her first collection of poems *Ālo o Chhāyā* (Light and Shade) was published in 1889. The book, published without the author's name, but with an appreciative introduction from the pen of Hem Chandra Banerji, the greatest living Bengali poet of the time, had such a warm reception from all sections of the reading public of Bengal that she had little doubt about the mission of her life.

But she lost sight of it soon. She went on writing for five years, when she married at the age of thirty, and for the next fifteen years her pen produced only a few stray poems and stories. The inner working of her mind during this period may be judged from the following incident: When a friend deplored the fact of her having ceased to write, she showed him her children and replied with a mother's pride, "Why, are they not my living poems?" She regarded motherhood as the highest fulfilment of womanhood. Then sorrows smote her one after another; she lost her husband in 1909 and her eldest son four years later. The muse got her back—her disconsolate heart sought solace in giving expression to the wounds in fine poetry and in ameliorating the condition of Bengalee women. She passed away in September, 1933, in the full glory of being recognized as the greatest woman poet in Bengali.

In estimating her poetry we are to take one fact into consideration. She had the misfortune of flourishing side by side with that scorching genius, the poet Tagore, who dominated the entire field of Bengali literature for about fifty years. Nevertheless, Kāminī's gentle flame burnt steadily in her own little corner of the vast field. Rabīndranāth's words and imageries gush out in torrents ; even when he expresses gentleness and pathos plainly, similes are so beautiful and words so musical that readers are carried away by them, few diving deep to taste the sentiment expressed. Kāminī's poetry has the charm of a beauty with the scantiest decorations. It has a directness of appeal ; her sentiments speak from the depths of her being, not depending on words or airs and graces of style, which, though not lacking, are never allowed to drown the ideas, which are sacred to her. She felt deeply and cherished sacredly, but expressed simply, lest its holiness be profaned. This seems to be the secret of her success, even against Rabīndranāth. She speaks of joys and pleasures too, but they are turned into something else, as coming out of a deeper sentiment which is more akin to sorrow, we may say, holy sadness.

In the nineteenth century her contributions were meagre. She just shook off her 'bashfulness,' as she expressed it herself. *Ālo o Chhāyā, Nirmālya* and *Paurāṇikī,* none of them her best production, were published between 1889 and 1897 ; but they, especially the first, secured for her a literary eminence that no poetess in Bengali had ever attained before. Her best work was *Mālya o Nirmālya,* which was published in 1913 and raised her just a little higher. Except to the fine critics of literature, however, she would ever be known to the Bengali-reading public as the author of *Ālo o Chhāyā.*

Sarojinī Nāiḍu: An ardent, versatile and dynamic genius was Sarojinī Nāiḍu (1879-1949), a poet, dreamer, idealist and politician. Sarojinī was the daughter of a great scientist and savant, Dr. Aghore Nāth Chaṭṭopādhyāy, who lived in Hyderābād and established the Nizam's College. She was born on 13th February, 1879, and early obtained a liberal training and catholic social outlook in her cosmopolitan home. About her father she wrote fondly: "My father is a dreamer himself, a great dreamer, a great man whose life has been a great failure. I think in the whole of India there are few men whose learning is greater than his, and I don't think there are many men more beloved," adding that he had spent all his money to help others and on alchemy. She went to England in 1895 with a state scholarship and studied for some time at the King's College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge. Three months after her return from England, Sarojinī married, in 1898, Dr. Govindarājulu Nāiḍu, breaking through barriers of caste as well as province.

It was in England, thanks to the encouragement of Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons, that Sarojinī developed her poetic gifts. Exquisitely did she sing about the beauty of the Indian landscape, about the common man and woman, about the Mughal prince and princess and more sadly about the subjection of India ; and yet her belief in India's future was bright and unwavering, even in the midst of political misfortune and disaster, as was her faith in Providence:

"The solace of faith to the lips that falter,
The succour of hope to the hands that fail,
The tidings of joy when Peace shall triumph,
When Truth shall conquer and Love prevail."

In Sarojinī Nāiḍu's poetry we find an exquisite melody and fine delicacy of feeling and expression blended with freshness and exuberance of spirit. The sensitiveness of a true lyrical genius charmingly responds to India's traditional sense of immanence of the deity feelingly and beautifully expressed:

"Lord of the Universe, Lord of our being,
Father eternal, ineffable Om!
Thou art the Seed and the Scythe of our harvests,
Thou art our Hands and our Heart and our Home,
We bring thee our lives and our labours for tribute,
Grant us thy succour, thy counsel, thy care,
O Life of all life and all blessing, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Brahma, with cymbal and prayer."

And similarly in her famous poem on Buddha, India's haunting sense of the unreality of life and her quest for the tranquillity of the soul enthral us:

"Lord Buddha, on thy Lotus-throne,
With praying eyes and hands elate,
What mystic rapture dost thou own,
Immutable and ultimate?

What peace, unravished of our ken,
Annihilate from the world of men?

The wind of change for ever blows
Across the tumult of our way,
Tomorrow's unborn griefs depose
The sorrows of our yesterday.
Dream yields to dream, strife follows strife,
And Death unweaves the webs of Life."

Although she felt happiest when she wrote her songs, Sarojinī Nāiḍu was gradually drawn from poetry to leadership in Indian women's movement and thence to active participation with Mahātmā Gāndhī in the fight for India's freedom, in which, too, she became a prominent figure. She travelled and lectured throughout India, promoting the cause of non-cooperation with the Government, mass movement, the *charkhā* (spinning wheel), emancipation of the depressed classes and Hindu-Muslim amity. For years she enthralled large audiences with the magic of her diction and eloquence. She was also incarcerated many times. She was a member of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress for many years and its (Congress) President in 1925. She was the first lady to become the Governor of a province in India—the Uttara Pradesh—which post she ably filled from 1947, the year of Indian Independence, until her death on 2nd March, 1949. The details of her brilliant political career are well known to all students of Indian freedom movement and need no repetition here.

CHAPTER XXIII

GREAT WOMEN DEVOTEES OF SHRĪ RĀMAKṚIṢHṆA

1. Rānī Rāsmaṇi

The pages of history scintillate with the achievements of women who have made valuable contributions to the making of India. Rānī Rāsmaṇi[1] was one such gifted woman whose memory is even now cherished with love and admiration by her countrymen. Though born of humble parents, she blossomed forth into one of the finest specimens of Indian womanhood even under the most trying conditions of life.

Wednesday, the 11th Āshwin of the Bengali Era 1200 (September, 1793 A.D.) was a happy day for Bengal, for it witnessed the birth of a girl whose name shortly became a household word in the province. Her father Harekṛiṣhṇa Dās, a Māhishya by caste and a labourer by profession, lived with his wife Rāmpriyā and two sons, Rāmchandra and Govinda, in a hamlet named Konā near Hālishahar, a few miles to the north of Calcutta, in the district of 24-Pargaṇās. The parents were delighted to have this child after the lapse of many years, and the mother began affectionately to call her Rānī, when she was only one year old. Strangely enough, this name, meaning a queen, which subsequently clung to her other name of Rāsmaṇi, was an unconscious betokener of her future greatness. As years rolled on, the little girl captured the hearts of all by her extraordinary devotion and eagerness to listen to the readings from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. She even put on some of the insignia of a Vaiṣhṇava devotee like her parents.

When Rāsmaṇi was only seven years old, Rāmpriyā suddenly passed away. This unexpected calamity created a great void in the mind of the girl. Three years passed by. Meanwhile a stage was being set elsewhere by Providence for Rāsmaṇi to rise quickly to affluence

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[1] Pronounced 'Rāshmaṇi.' In Bengali the letter *s*, unless followed by certain consonants, sounds like *sh*.

SHRĪ RĀMAKṚIṢHṆA

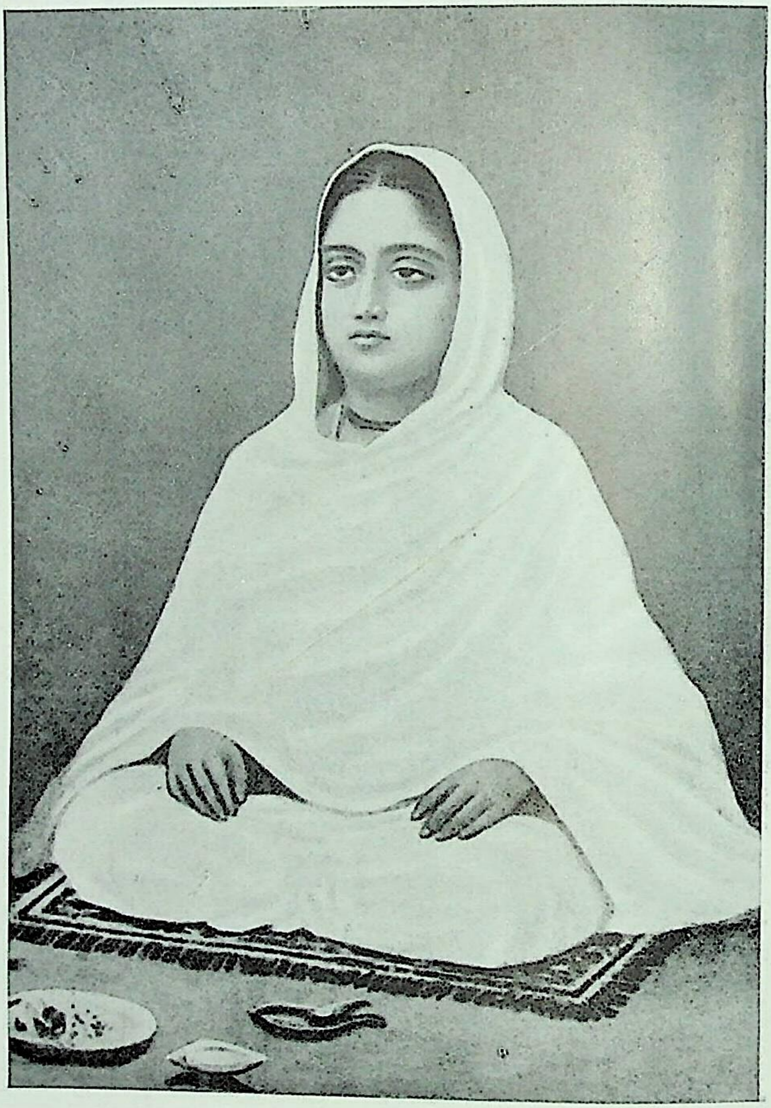
and fame. One Prītrām (short for Prītirām) Dās, an inhabitant of Khoshālpur in the district of Howrah, amassed a large fortune by dint of his business talent and perseverance in Calcutta, and lived in a palatial building on Free School Street in the city. At his old age his younger son Rājchandra became the stay of the family. Rājchandra married twice, but both the wives died within a very short time. He was disinclined to marry a third time. But on a certain occasion he went by boat for a bath in the Ganges at Triveṇī, in the Hooghly district, and while passing by the bathing ghat on the river near the village Konā, was struck with the beauty of a young girl who had come to bathe there. It was our Rānī Rāsmaṇi. When his father came to know of his desire to marry the girl, he hailed it as a divine dispensation and arranged the marriage, which took place in great pomp on the 8th Vaishākha of the Bengali Era 1211 (1804 A.D.), at his Calcutta residence.

This sudden change of fortune was no doubt a windfall to Rāsmaṇi, but even in the midst of plenty she did not give up her wonted simplicity and piety. She made it a part of her daily duty to serve her aged parents-in-law. She also attended to the details of household work. It was further noticed that with her advent into the family, there was an appreciable increase in its income. So she was loved by everybody. In course of time her intelligence and sober judgement so much impressed her husband Rājchandra that he consulted her in all important matters.

In 1817 Prītrām breathed his last at the age of sixty-four, leaving a big estate and several lakhs of rupees in cash to his son Rājchandra. He now became a very influential person, whose friendship was cultivated by the foremost men of Calcutta. In 1821 Rājchandra removed to a newly built palatial edifice across the road ; it was divided into seven sections, had about three hundred rooms and cost twenty-five lakhs of rupees. Rājchandra endeared himself to all by his extensive charities, and was much respected for his remarkable uprightness. In the midst of all this domestic felicity, Rānī Rāsmaṇi lost her father in 1823. It was the year in which there were floods in different parts of the province, and she gave food and shelter to a large number of families who had been rendered homeless and destitute by them. Finding that the ghat on the Ganges near her residence was uneven and dangerous, and the road leading to it was unusable, she persuaded her husband to build them both with the permission of the authorities. Opened in 1830, they were named after him and have since come to be known as Bābu Ghāt and Bābu Road.

But bitter days were awaiting Rāsmaṇi. On 1st June, 1836, in his forty-ninth year, Rājchandra died suddenly of apoplexy, leaving three daughters, all married. She was so much overwhelmed by this catastrophe that she did not take any food or drink for three days. A magnificent *shrāddha* ceremony in honour of the departed soul was performed by her, and so liberal was she on this occasion that none returned from her door with their desires unfulfilled. At the close of the ceremony a pleasant incident occurred. A monk with matted locks put in an appearance. It was he who, many years back, had made a present of the image of Shrī Raghunāthjī to Rājchandra for daily worship in the house. Rāsmaṇi was much impressed by the monk and begged him to accept some gift. But he asked for only a blanket and a water-pot. He wished to have a look at Shrī Raghunāthjī, which done, he went away after blessing her. She took it as a good omen.

Thrown upon her own resources, Rānī Rāsmaṇi rose to the occasion. In spite of her growing intensity of religious fervour, she was not in the least indifferent to the secular interests of the family. In the absence of her husband, she felt greater responsibility in the management of the vast property she had inherited, and tackled the most delicate situations with consummate skill. Her son-in-law Mathurānāth Bishwās now became her right-hand man in all matters. Her extensive charities and humanitarian activities in and outside Bengal soon became proverbial. An idea of her munificence may be had from the fact that during her visit to Purī in 1850, she presented three diamond-studded crowns for the principal deities in the temple of Jagannātha at a cost of rupees sixty thousand, besides making liberal gifts to the priests. Similarly, in her second pilgrimage to Nabadwīp, the birth-place of Shrī Chaitanya, she spent in one week rupees twenty thousand as gifts to the pandits, and another five to six thousand as charity on the occasion of an eclipse. Among her benefactions of public utility may be mentioned the renovation of a portion of the road to Purī beyond the river Subarṇarekhā, and construction of a canal connecting the rivers Madhumatī and



RĀNĪ RĀSMAṆI

Nabagaṅgā, which helped agriculture, and three ghats on the Ganges, including the one at her native village.

After the death of Rājchandra, she began to live a very rigorous life, and strictly followed the scriptural injunctions regarding a Hindu widow. All the Hindu festivals were celebrated by her with extraordinary pomp and zeal. At the time of the principal celebrations her entire mansion of seven sections, containing over three hundred rooms, reverberated with joy and became for the time being a miniature town. An example of her religious fervour may be had from the following incident. In 1838, some time before the Car Festival she desired to have the deity travel in the streets of Calcutta in a silver car. Accordingly, orders were placed with Indian silversmiths, for the Rānī did not want to patronize foreign jewellers. On the *snānayātrā* day the car was dedicated with great *éclat*. The cost of the whole affair was nearly a lakh and a quarter of rupees. On the day of the Car Festival there was a grand procession with the car. During the autumnal worship of the Divine Mother Durgā, the Rānī used to spend rupees fifty to sixty thousand. Once, in the course of a preliminary rite of this worship, the brahmins were going to the Ganges in procession early in the morning to the accompaniment of music, in which drums figured prominently. A white resident of Bābu Road who was in bed felt disturbed, and wanted to stop it with the help of the authorities. On receipt of this news, the Rānī's men arranged for more lusty music on the next day. After the worship was over, a restraint order was served on the Rānī, and in the wake of it there was a lawsuit, which she lost and had to pay a fine of rupees fifty. She paid the fine, but forthwith blocked the intersections between her house and Bābu Ghat with strong wooden posts. The authorities objected, but she told them that she had proprietary rights over that land and could do whatever she liked with it. Finally, at their request she removed the barricade, and her fine too was refunded.

But, as has been seen above, her religious practices were not performed indoors only; for self-purification, she undertook occasional pilgrimage-tours to holy places, some of them long and dangerous ones. In 1850, while going to Purī by boat, she was overtaken by violent storm. In 1852, on her way back from a pilgrimage to Nabadwīp and other places, she fell into the hands of bandits near Chandernagore, and extricated herself from their clutches by promising to pay a ransom of twelve thousand rupees—a promise which she kept. The experiences she gathered, and the dangers she encountered, during these journeys served only to deepen her faith in God and increased her religious fervour.

We shall now narrate a few more incidents that bespeak Rānī Rāsmaṇi's courage and presence of mind as also her love of justice and equity, which have secured for her an enviable position in the hierarchy of Indian womanhood.

The East India Company levied a heavy tax on the fishermen who used to catch fish in the Ganges near Calcutta. All their supplications and appeals for its reduction proved fruitless. As the last resort, they approached Rāsmaṇi and placed their grievances before her, with a request to safeguard their time-honoured and legitimate rights to catch fish free of taxes. Rāsmaṇi's sense of justice rebelled against the high-handedness of the East India Company, and she made a quick decision. She took a lease of the portion of the Ganges lying between Ghusuri and Metiāburz from the Company for Rs. 10,000, and put up barriers across the river to obstruct the ingress and egress of boats and ships. The Company took strong exception to her action and asked her to show cause why she should not be prosecuted for obstructing the passage in that way. Rāsmaṇi's answer was as simple as it was bold. She told the Government that the constant movement of boats and ships in that area greatly disturbed the fish and caused them to spawn prematurely, to the great loss of the fishery of her tenants. It was to protect their interests that she had done so. The Company had to yield to the superior strategy of Rāsmaṇi. It permitted the fishermen to fish in the Ganges free of tax. Her purpose having been served, she removed the obstructions.

Another striking event testifies to her heroism and devotion. Immediately after the subsidence of the Sepoy Mutiny, some soldiers were quartered in the Free School building near the Rānī's house. Some of them used to roam in the street in a drunken state and waylay the pedestrians. One day the Rānī's gate-keepers beat a few of these ruffians. In retaliation, a big batch of soldiers attacked the house and, overpowering the gate-keepers, began to damage whatever they could lay their hands on and kill or mutilate the pet animals and birds. All members of the family except the Rānī had meanwhile sought safety, evidently under her advice, in a relative's house near by through a backdoor. With a sword in her hand the Rānī posted herself at the door of the temple of Shrī Raghunāthjī to prevent its desecration even at the cost of her life. Fortunately, the soldiers did not go to that side, and soon dispersed at the order of their commanding officer, who had just arrived on intimation.

One Mr. Donald was an indigo planter. Every student of history knows how these planters attained notoriety by their wicked activities. Mr. Donald was not an exception. His inhuman oppression of the tenants of the estate of Makimpur, belonging to the Rānī, created a great commotion in the locality. The tale of their woes reached the ears of the Rānī, who despatched a strong body of men to bring the planter to his senses. Needless to say, Mr. Donald received condign punishment, and the case instituted against the Rānī was dismissed, to the great humiliation of the planter. Since then the planters did not dare to oppress the tenants of her estate.

A powerful zemindar in the district of Jessore attempted by various means to absorb Rānī Rāsmaṇi's estate of Jagannāthpur, which stood encircled by his landed property. Coming to know of the cruelties perpetrated by his men, she sent a large number of her own trained men under a capable leader to stop them. This had the desired effect. The oppressors beat a hasty retreat. The litigation that ensued was decided in the Rānī's favour. The zemindar had thus to eat humble pie and to desist from his inroads.

The Rānī's life now entered upon a new phase. Soon an unforeseen incident occurred, which had a far-reaching effect on her subsequent career. For a long time she had been cherishing a strong desire to go on a prilgrimage to Banāras to offer worship to the Lord Vishwanātha and Annapūrṇā. When all arrangements were complete, and a large fleet of boats equipped with requisite articles were in readiness to start on the following morning, she dreamt at night that the Divine Mother, who was her special object of worship, appeared before her and ordered her to abandon the journey and erect a temple to Her on the bank of the Ganges. The Mother further told her that her heart's desire would be fulfilled if she worshipped Her in an image there. Rāsmaṇi gave up the idea of pilgrimage, to the great surprise and disappointment of all. In the year 1847, twenty acres of land with a house were purchased at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, on the eastern bank of the Ganges, four miles to the north of Calcutta. The plot happened to have a convex surface and was thus quite suitable for the worship of the Divine Mother. The Rānī ordered the construction of the temple, but there were difficulties, so that it took about seven years to complete it.

It is said that the Rānī practised extreme austerity from the beginning of the moulding of the image, and waited with keen expectancy for the day when the Goddess would be installed in the temple. The 31st May, 1855, which was the auspicious day of *snānayātrā,* was fixed for the installation ceremony. But an insurmountable obstacle stood in the way. Rāsmaṇi being a Shūdra by caste, no orthodox brahmin, according to the traditions of the time, would officiate as her priest or partake of the sacramental food offered to the Mother. Nothing daunted, she wrote to the renowned pandits of different schools of thought, inviting their considered opinion in the matter. Only one gave a favourable decision on the point. This was Rāmkumār Chaṭṭopādhyāy, the learned pandit of the Jhāmāpukur *chatuṣhpāṭhī* (Sanskrit school) in Calcutta. He replied to the effect that it would be in keeping with the injunctions of the scriptures if the Rānī made a gift of the temple to a brahmin and provided adequate funds for its maintenance. The reply came as a godsend and was hailed with great joy by Rāsmaṇi. As directed by Rāmkumār, she conveyed the temple to her spiritual preceptor, purchased a big estate for over two and a quarter lakhs of rupees in the district of Dinājpur, and set its income apart for the maintenance of the temple by a deed of gift.

The dream of Rānī Rāsmaṇi was thus fulfilled. On the appointed day, the Divine Mother, who was of the essence of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, was invoked in the image. The temple, with its hallowed atmosphere, secluded groves and the sacred Ganges flowing by, became from now on a haven of peace for all those who sought relief from the grinding tyranny of mundane cares and troubles. Besides the Kālī temple, there stands on its north another temple dedicated to Rādhā and Kṛiṣhṇa, and the western border of the spacious rectangular courtyard is lined with a row of twelve Shiva temples, all of the same size and pattern.

There are also rooms for the kitchen, store, quarters for the temple staff, etc. Outside the compound proper, there are two music-towers as also a big building meant for the use of the members of Rāsmaṇi's family during their occasional visits to the temple. The flower garden, tanks and trees have all added to the beauty and serenity of the holy place. Rāmkumār was appointed priest of the Kālī temple. Rāsmaṇi went often to this sanctuary and offered her heart's prayer to the Divine Mother.

One day Mathur, the Rānī's son-in-law, noticed a young man of handsome features roaming about in the precincts of the Kālī temple. There was something uncommon in his appearance. A spirit of other-worldliness was writ large on his face. At the very first sight Mathur began to feel a great attraction for him. On inquiry he came to know that the young man had been staying with his eldest brother Rāmkumār in the temple garden, and that his name was Gadādhar. Both Rāsmaṇi and Mathur wanted Gadādhar to be engaged in some work in the temple, and succeeded after much persuasion in making him agree to take up the work of dressing and decorating the Divine Mother. A few days after, the priest of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa temple, while taking the image of Kṛishṇa to the retiring room, slipped on the floor, and one leg of the image was broken. The priest was summarily dismissed. Rāsmaṇi was extremely mortified at the inauspicious event. Learned pandits were consulted as to what should be done with regard to the broken image. After a good deal of deliberation, they decided that the image should at once be consigned to the Ganges and a new one installed in its place. But this decision did not appeal to the pious Rānī. Through an intermediary she approached Gadādhar, who after listening to the whole story exclaimed in an exalted mood, "The decision of the pandits is preposterous. If a son-in-law of the Rānī fractured his leg, would she procure a substitute for him, or treat the leg? The image should be repaired and worshipped as before." The pandits were nonplussed to hear this solution, which was so simple and rational. At the request of the Rānī, the image was repaired by Gadādhar and was installed in the temple for worship as before.

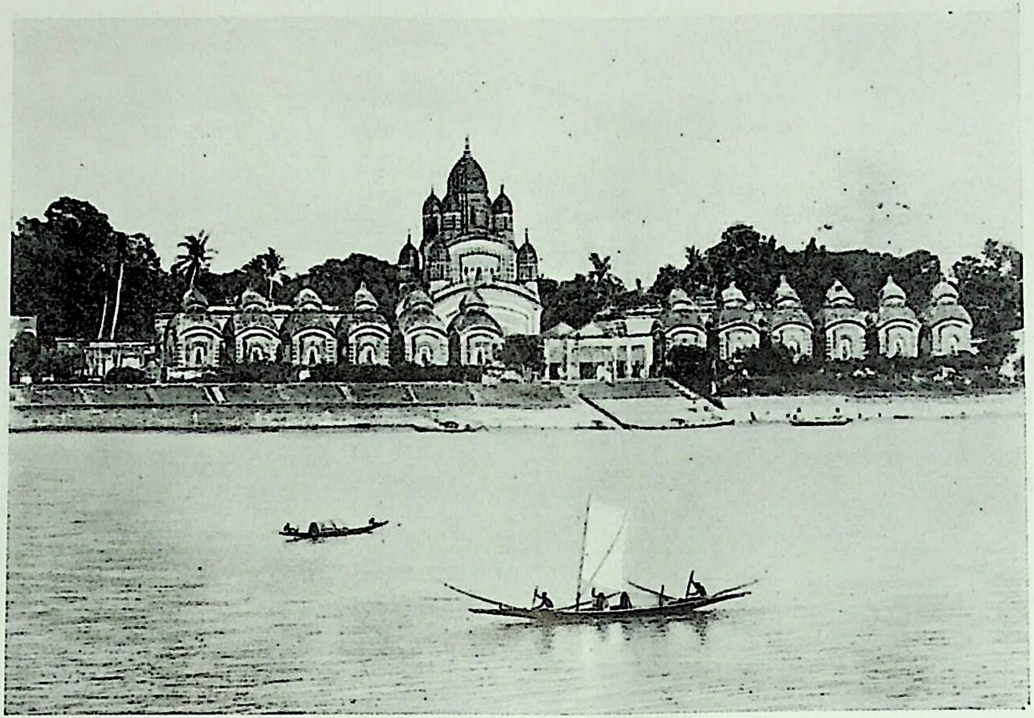
After the demise of Rāmkumār, Gadādhar (better known later as Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa) was appointed chief priest of the Divine Mother.

To him the image of Kālī was not an inert stone, but the Divine Mother Herself. As days rolled on, he plunged deeper and deeper into the contemplation of the Mother and became perfectly indifferent to what people thought about him. In the long run he was blessed with the vision of the Divine Mother. Since then, owing to the intensity of religious fervour, he could no longer conduct the worship of the Goddess regularly and in the orthodox style. But the Rānī and Mathur were so charmed to see the God-intoxication of the young priest and his ecstatic absorption in divine service that they considered themselves fortunate in having such a spiritually gifted priest for the Mother's worship. Rānī Rāsmaṇi sincerely felt that his strange mode of worship bespoke the depth of devotion rather than any mental derangement, as was suspected by laymen. She was now fully convinced that the object of building the temple, the manifestation of the Mother Herself in the image, had been literally fulfilled.

One day after a bath in the Ganges, she entered the Kālī temple and requested Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa to entertain the Mother with a devotional song. He complied and poured his whole soul into the song. But the Rānī was absent-minded ; she was thinking of a lawsuit instead of listening to the song. Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa at once intuited it and gave her a slap on the back, which brought her to her senses. She felt abashed and retired to her chamber with a heart full of repentance. When her astonished attendants criticized the young priest's insolence towards her, she at once silenced them by saying that the Divine Mother Herself had punished her for her own lapse and illumined her heart through Rāmakṛishṇa.

Gradually Rānī Rāsmaṇi detached herself as far as possible from the affairs of the estate, leaving its management to her worthy son-in-law Mathurānāth, and began to pass much of her time in devotional exercises in the temple garden of Dakṣhiṇeshwar. Her intense devotion to Kālī, her reliance on Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa for guidance in spiritual matters and, above all, her respect for all forms of worship endued her life with a superb grace and halo.

But Rāsmaṇi's earthly days were coming to a close. It was now time for her to be eternally united with the Blissful Mother. One day she was attacked with fever and stomach trouble, which eventually developed into chronic dysentery of a severe nature. According



DAKSHIṆESHWAR TEMPLE

to the wishes of the Rānī, she was removed to her residence at Kālīghāṭ on the bank of the sacred Ādigaṅgā. Shortly before her final exit, her body was half immersed in the stream. It was night, and some lights were burning. But she asked all lights to be removed, since they looked pale before the effulgence of the Divine Mother, who revealed Herself to her all on a sudden. Her face beamed with joy to visualize the dearest object of her worship. Thus on the 19th February, 1861, with the name of the Divine Mother on her lips, Rānī Rāsmaṇi passed quietly into Eternity.

2. YOGESHWARĪ BHAIRAVĪ BRĀHMAṆĪ

It was a pleasant morning in the spring of 1861. The sun was just rising. At that balmy hour Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa stepped out of his room (at Dakṣhiṇeshwar) in an absorbed mood and began to cull flowers from the temple garden for the worship of the Divine Mother. The whole atmosphere was steeped in ineffable peace. Suddenly there appeared a small country boat on the Ganges, approaching the northern bathing ghat of the temple. The Master (Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa), looking in that direction from the garden, witnessed a middle-aged, ochre-robed *sannyāsinī* (nun) with dishevelled hair coming out of that boat with a small bundle in her hand, and felt a strong urge to meet her. He watched the movements of this strange woman, who slowly walked up to the *chāndnī,* the main roofed-entrance to the temple compound, and took her seat in a corner of it, as if waiting for somebody. Her lovely countenance and superb physical grace, born of lifelong virginity, made her look much younger than her age. The bundle containing a few books and one or two pieces of cloth was all that she possessed. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa instinctively felt that she was not an ordinary woman and had come there to fulfil a distinct divine purpose. Subsequent events proved the truth of this.

After returning to his room, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa called his nephew Hṛidaynāth and asked him to bring the *sannyāsinī* from the *chāndnī* to his presence. Hṛiday's surprise knew no bounds, for the Master had seldom been seen to be so eager to talk to an unknown woman. So he said in reply, "Well, she is a strange lady. Why should she come even if invited?" Finding Hṛiday hesitant, the Master gravely said, "Go and tell her all about me, and she will gladly come here." Hṛiday had no alternative but to go and found the nun (or Bhairavī, as she was called) seated there in a meditative pose. He intimated to her that his God-intoxicated uncle was waiting to meet her in his room. No sooner had she heard this than she complied without a moment's hesitation, to the greater surprise of Hṛiday. Immediately on meeting Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, the Bhairavī burst into tears of joy and said very affectionately, "My child, you are here! Knowing that you are somewhere on the banks of the Ganges, I have been searching for you for a long time, and now I have found you." "How could you know about me, mother?" asked the Master. "Through the grace of the Divine Mother," she replied, "I had come to know that I was to meet three of you. I have already met two (Chandra and Girijā) in East Bengal, and I find you here today."

Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa sat quite close to her and, like a boy unbosoming himself to his mother, recounted artlessly his many spiritual visions and experiences, his loss of outer consciousness at the time of his ecstatic absorption in the thought of God, the burning sensation he felt all over the body, his sleeplessness and other symptoms he had noticed during the period of his *sādhanā*. He asked her repeatedly, "Well, can you tell me what these things are? People call me mad. Have I really become insane? Is this the result of my constant prayer to the Divine Mother?" The Brāhmaṇī, while listening to his description of these wonderful spiritual experiences, was elated with joy. Full of motherly tenderness, she consoled him again and again, saying, "Who calls you mad, my son? This is not madness. You have attained to a state of spiritual exaltation called *mahābhāva* in the *bhakti* (devotional) literature—an extraordinary state of religious ecstasy which is attended with nineteen external characteristics such as tears, tremor of the body, standing of hair on end and perspiration. Any one who has not experienced such a state can hardly understand it, and that is why men of the world call you insane. Shrī Rādhā and Shrī Gaurāṅga had an experience of such a blessed state. It is all recorded in the *bhakti shāstras* (scriptures). I have got those scriptures with me, and I shall prove through them that whoever has called upon God with an unswerving spirit of devotion and with the utmost sincerity has experienced it, and everyone practising it will be blessed with such an experience." These emphatic words of the Bhairavī greatly consoled and reassured Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa.

In the course of her long conversation with him, she disclosed her own antecedents: She was born, she said, in a brahmin family in the district of Jessore (Bengal). Her name was Yogeshwarī and she was a virgin all along, spending the major portion of her life in yoga practices, as a result of which she had attained to great mystic powers. She was extremely delighted to find that Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was the fittest person to receive spiritual lessons on the Tāntrika form of *sādhanā* and to restore it to its pristine purity and glory by rescuing it from the hands of its unworthy followers, who had degraded it beyond measure by their abominable practices.

As the day had already far advanced, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa gave her some *prasāda* (sacramental food) from the Kālī temple, and she partook of it after visiting all the temples in the compound. She then went to the *pañchavaṭī* (grove of five sacred trees) to cook the raw foodstuffs she had received from the temple store. The cooking over, she placed the food in front of her chosen deity, Raghuvīra (Rāma), whose stone emblem she always carried tied round her neck, and mentally offered the same to Him. In the course of this meditation, she became totally oblivious of the outside world, and tears rolled down her cheeks on seeing a wonderful vision. Meanwhile Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa felt an irresistible urge to go to the *pañchavaṭī* and appeared, in a semi-conscious state, where the Brāhmaṇī sat absorbed in meditation. Like a man possessed, he began to eat the offerings placed before Raghuvīra! Some time later, the Brāhmaṇī, coming down to the normal plane, opened her eyes and was thrilled to see Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa taking the offerings. It was a delightful surprise to her to find before her very eyes the concrete re-enactment of what she had just seen in her meditation. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was not his normal self at the time, and could not realize what he was doing in that state. He felt abashed when he came down to the normal plane and apologized to her, saying, "Really I do not know what makes me do such things in an unconscious state." The Brāhmaṇī consoled him saying, "You have done well, my son. It is not you, but the One who is within you, who has done this thing. I realized, at the time of meditation, who did it and why. I have now come to the conclusion that I no longer need any ceremonial worship, which has at last fructified." So saying, the Brāhmaṇī, without the least hesitation, ate the remnants of the food as *prasāda*, and subsequently, with tears of joy trickling down her cheeks and with a heart full of the conviction that her Raghuvīra had become embodied in the person of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, consigned to the Ganges the sacred emblem of the deity so long devoutly worshipped by her.

As days passed, the relation between Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa and the Bhairavī became closer and closer, and the latter, with motherly solicitude, began to play the role of a teacher. She was well acquainted with the Tantras and the Vaishṇava literature, and had acquired great spiritual wisdom by practising various religious exercises. She quoted chapter and verse in support of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's manifold spiritual realizations, and removed from his mind all doubt about their validity. For about a week both passed the greater part of their time in the *pañchavaṭī* in enlightened talks on matters spiritual and various forms of *sādhanā*. Then it struck the Master that this close association with the youthful Bhairavī might be misunderstood by worldly people. A slight hint to her to that effect from the Master was quite enough to make her realize the situation, and she immediately shifted herself to the *chāndnī* of Devamaṇḍal Ghāt on the Ganges, a little to the north of the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple. Her purity of character, suavity of manners, loving nature and dignified personality made a profound impression upon the villagers, and she felt no difficulty in getting her daily food and requirements supplied from the village.

The Brāhmaṇī, a Vaiṣhṇava devotee of a high order, used to go to the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple daily from her new abode and feed Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa with various sweets and milk preparations. Sometimes she would wait in her own residence with butter and cream in hand, cry 'Gopāla,' 'Gopāla' in an excess of emotion, and shed profuse tears of love for him. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa felt at that moment an irresistible attraction and had to go in hot haste to the place where the Brāhmaṇī lived. Reaching there, he would sit by her side like a little child and eat the cream and butter from her hand. On other occasions, she would put on silk cloth and precious ornaments procured for this purpose, proceed with various delicacies to the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple in the company of women, singing devotional songs all the way, and feed Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. With her dishevelled hair and ecstatic emotion, she looked and behaved exactly as Yashodā, the foster-mother of Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa, did when she felt a strong yearning to see and feed her beloved Gopāla.

The Brāhmaṇī was now fully convinced that all the extraordinary experiences of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa were the result of his deep-seated love for God, and that Shrī Chaitanya had once again been incarnated in him inasmuch as all the salient traits of Chaitanya were eloquently expressed in him. Another incident, though apparently trifling, strengthened her belief: Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa had long been suffering from a burning sensation all over the body. As the pain grew in intensity and became almost unbearable at midday, he had to plunge into the Ganges and cover his head with a wet napkin. All efforts of renowned physicians failed to cure this strange malady. The Brāhmaṇī soon diagnosed it as the effect of his intense longing for God, and substantiated this by quoting scriptural authority. She prescribed a novel remedy: The patient, she said, should wear a wreath of fragrant flowers and besmear his body with sandal paste. This simple prescription evoked at the outset nothing but laughter from many wiseacres; but Mathurānāth, the director of the temple, agreed to give it a trial. Great was the surprise of all when Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was completely cured by this method in the course of only three days. Indeed, this strange phenomenon furnished an additional proof to the Brāhmaṇī that he was an Incarnation of God. Moreover, when she heard that Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa had had a vision of two luminous boys coming out of his body on his way to Sihor, she had not the least doubt that Shrī Chaitanya had this time appeared in the frame of his comrade Nityānanda.

Another abnormal experience of the Master further proved the truth of her hypothesis: He was seized with a ravenous appetite, which no amount of eating could satisfy. In utter despair, he consulted the Brāhmaṇī about it. She consoled him by saying, "My son, don't worry. Those who are highly advanced in spirituality occasionally pass through such peculiar states. I shall prescribe a remedy that will quickly cure it." She asked Mathurānāth to stock in a room a variety of delicacies prepared according to her directions. When this was done, she told Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa to remain in that room day and night, and eat whenever and whatever he liked. He did as instructed, and his hunger came down to normal after three days.

Indeed, this kind of inordinate hunger was observed in the lives of many great saints. The Brāhmaṇī now armed with the facts of the Master's wonderful spiritual experiences that strangely coincided with the recorded evidence of the scriptures, and also being emboldened by her phenomenal success in certain crucial tests, began to assert boldly that Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa was not an ordinary person, but an Incarnation of God born to fulfil some distinct need of the age, and she laid bare all her convictions not only to Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa and Hṛiday but also to all others with whom she came into daily contact.

One day the Master, while talking with Hṛiday and Mathur at the *pañchavaṭī,* casually remarked to the latter, "A brahmin woman well versed in Vaishṇava lore has come here. She calls me an Incarnation of God." "How is that possible," replied Mathur, "since the scriptures do not mention more than ten Incarnations. But that you have received the grace of the Mother Kālī can hardly be doubted." The Master said, "The Brāhmaṇī says that she has witnessed in my body as also in my mental make-up the distinctive signs that characterize an Incarnation, and these she avers on the strength of scriptural pronouncements." As the conversation drifted on in this strain, the Brāhmaṇī was seen approaching in a semi-abstracted mood, with a dish of sweets. Mathur asked the Master if she was the Brāhmaṇī of whom he had been speaking. The Master nodded assent. As she came near, she partially controlled her emotions at the sight of Mathur and gave the plate to Hṛiday. Pointing to Mathur, the Master said to the Brāhmaṇī, "I was just acquainting him with all that you had said about me. But he firmly says that the scriptures speak only of ten Incarnations and no more." "Why," she promptly replied, "the *Bhāgavata* makes a special mention of twenty-two, and suggests the possibility of the advent of an infinite number of them. Moreover, it is recorded in the Vaishṇava literature that Shrī Gauraṅga would be reincarnated, and there are points of similarity between him and Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa." She was so firmly convinced that she threw an open challenge and was prepared to meet any distinguished scholar to prove her contention.

The bold declaration of the Brāhmaṇī changed the entire complexion of the opinion hitherto entertained about the Master by the temple staff. The man who had so long been looked upon as no better than a lunatic was suddenly raised to the category of an Incarnation of God and was ranked overnight with Rāma, Kṛiṣhṇa and Buddha! Mathur was no less puzzled than the officers of the temple. Torn between faith and doubt, he found himself in a dilemma. He could hardly persuade himself to think of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa as God Himself, though his personal experiences about the Master during the last few years compelled him to admit him as a remarkable spiritual genius. But when the challenge came from one who was held in high esteem by all for her saintliness as well as profundity of scholarship, Mathur, partly to humour the Master and partly to satisfy his own curiosity, agreed to convene a meeting of some renowned scholars of the time in the temple garden of Dakṣhiṇeshwar.

Accordingly, invitations were extended among others to Vaiṣhṇav Charaṇ and Paṇḍit Gaurīkānta Tarkālaṅkār, the leading savants of the day, who were highly respected in their respective spheres for their scholarship and rare spiritual attainments. Besides the Brāhmaṇī, Mathur and Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa were also present in the meeting. The Brāhmaṇī, with her god-gifted oratory and force of conviction, presented her case very ably before the august assembly. Like a zealous mother guarding the interests of her son, she marshalled her arguments and met all objections squarely. It was a great triumph for her, since eventually every one present in the meeting fully subscribed to her conclusions. Vaiṣhṇav Charaṇ asserted that the highest form of devotion known in the *bhakti shāstras* as the *mahābhāva* was fully manifest in Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, and that while in certain extraordinary cases only a few of its divine characteristics had been noticeable, in Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa all of them seemed to be fully developed. Mathur and others were struck dumb at this bold utterance of Vaiṣhṇav Charaṇ, who was an authority on the Vaiṣhṇava literature at the time. Paṇḍit Gaurīkānta Tarkālaṅkār, who, for some unavoidable reasons, could not be present in the first meeting, attended the subsequent one held for this purpose, and asserted in unequivocal terms, "I am firmly convinced that you are that mine of infinite spiritual power, only a small fraction of which appears in the world from time to time in the form of Incarnations. I feel it in my heart, and the scriptures are in my favour. I am ready to prove my contention to anybody who challenges me in the matter." Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa thereupon remarked like a boy, "Well, it is you who say so, but believe me, I know nothing about it." The momentous decision of the scholars in corroboration of the bold conclusions of the Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī regarding the real personality of the Master strengthened the already changed attitude of the temple people towards him, though he remained as unconcerned as before.

The relationship between him and the Brāhmaṇī became deeper, and she set herself to the task of leading him through the various phases of Tāntrika *sādhanā* (practice). Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, who had accepted her as his spiritual guide, now applied himself to the *sādhanā* with his characteristic zeal. The Brāhmaṇī had two *āsanas* (seats) prepared in accordance with the injunctions of the Tāntrika literature—one in the *pañchavaṭī* and another under the *bael* tree at the northern extremity of the garden. Referring to this course of *sādhanā,* the Master said afterwards, "During the day-time the Brāhmaṇī used to go to distant places and collect the various rare ingredients of worship mentioned in the Tāntrika scriptures. At nightfall she would direct me to occupy one of the seats, make me perform the worship of the Divine Mother with the articles collected by her, and ask me to repeat the *mantra* (sacred formula) and meditate according to her instructions. But scarcely had I commenced to tell my beads when I fell into a deep trance—so overwhelmed did I become with an accession of divine emotion. Wonderful visions that baffle all description came in quick succession, and I could most tangibly feel the effects of those practices. The Brāhmaṇī put me through all the spiritual exercises embodied in the sixty-four principal Tantras, and the infinite grace of the Mother enabled me to pass unscathed through those fiery ordeals. Some of them were so dangerous that they very often caused the aspirant to lose his foothold and slip into moral turpitude."

As a result of this successful practice under the able guidance of the Brāhmaṇī, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's mind was raised to the highest pitch of divine beatitude, and he floated day and night in the shoreless ocean of perennial joy. The Brāhmaṇī declared that her disciple had attained perfection in this system of practice and had been fully established in the ideal of the Motherhood of God.

Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's acceptance of the Brāhmaṇī as his spiritual guide was calculated to have far-reaching effects on the social position of women in India. It paved the way for their reinstatement in the rightful position of privilege and honour from which they had come to be dislodged in the process of time, and opened a new chapter in the history of womanhood in the country. It also led to the restoration of the Tantras to their original purity and glory. The Tantras, it must be remembered, seek to lead spiritual aspirants gradually through a well-regulated course of enjoyment to greater and greater renunciation, and ultimately to the realization of God. Through this process they transcend by degrees the lure of the senses and pass eventually into the realm of infinite bliss. But in course of time the cult came into disrepute, for its unworthy followers, forgetting the deeper import of its teachings, adopted degrading methods to satisfy their baser instincts. The Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī, with the help of her distinguished disciple Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, demonstrated the real worth of the Tantras and saved them from passing into the limbo of oblivion.

Time rolled on. The Brāhmaṇī continued to bestow the same affection on Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa. Then the Master met the Nāgā saint Totāpurī, who taught him the *adwaita* (monistic) philosophy and initiated him into *sannyāsa* (the monastic vow). The Brāhmaṇī was at heart a staunch follower of the cult of *bhakti* (devotion), and as such she could not reconcile herself to the principles of *adwaita* Vedānta. She did not even relish Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's close association with Totāpurī, apprehending that his devotion would suffer a set-back from it, and once she openly said so to him. But he did not attach any importance to these words, and followed his own course of life according to the dictates of the Divine Mother. Inscrutable are the ways of the Lord. Despite the Brāhmaṇī's high spiritual attainments, by slow degrees a sense of false pride grew up in her mind for having acted as a spiritual guide to the Master. She considered herself a very important person, and sometimes called in question some of his normal activities. This undue pride clouded her vision and made her commit mistakes frequently.

Immediately after the close of his prolonged *adwaita* practice, Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa became physically very weak owing to a severe attack of dysentery, and it was considered desirable to send him to Kāmārpukur for a change. Accordingly in May, 1867, he came to Kāmārpukur, accompanied by Hṛiday and the Bhairavī Brāhmaṇī. The simple-minded villagers were exceedingly glad to have him back in their midst after a long interval. He was as affable as before; only his very presence now poured unspeakable joy and serenity into their hearts, drove away all worries and inspired in them a feeling of deep devotion to God. Sāradā Devī, his young wife, who was now fourteen years old, was soon sent for. She considered it a rare privilege to be at the service of her saintly husband after so many years, and looked up to him for guidance and illumination. Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, without the least hesitation, undertook the responsible work of training her in matters both secular and spiritual. Thus, not only all the details of domestic work, but also the supreme duty to love and realize God in this very life, came within the purview of his teaching. And Sāradā Devī, charmed with his pure and selfless love, was content to adore him as her *ishṭa-deva* (chosen deity), and followed in his footsteps with unflinching devotion to fulfil her spiritual aspirations. But the Brāhmaṇī did not countenance his intimate association with his wife, who was now in the bloom of youth, inasmuch as it might endanger his celibate life. The Master would not listen to her remonstrances, which annoyed her much. On the contrary, he hailed it as a golden opportunity to test his own spiritual realizations. He remembered the inspiring words of his teacher Totāpurī when he learnt from the Master that he was married: "What does it matter? He alone is firmly established in the knowledge of Brahman who can keep intact his renunciation and discrimination even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look upon man and woman alike as *ātman* (the Soul) and deal with them accordingly." Needless to say, Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa emerged brighter than ever from this fiery ordeal.

As already stated, the Brāhmaṇī had unfortunately become inflated with egotism, so much so that she could not even brook the idea that any one should refer to Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa for the solution of any spiritual topic that had already been discussed in her presence.

AGHORMAṆI DEVĪ

One day she picked a violent quarrel with Hṛiday. She insisted on cleaning the leavings of a true devotee belonging to a humble caste, which on account of her being of brahmin birth, was outrageous in the eyes of the village people. Hṛiday begged her to desist, but she was adamant, with the result that high words were exchanged between them. Finally she was prevailed upon to yield. The Master witnessed the whole scene and smiled to see the play of *maya* (divine power of illusion). But when the anger of the Brāhmaṇī subsided, she realized her mistake and hung her head in shame. It soon dawned upon her that it was not advisable for her to remain any longer with the family. She now began to prepare herself to snap the golden tie of attachment she had developed to the Master. The veil of temporary self-forgetfulness dropped off from her mind, and she regained a clear vision. After a few days, she, with a heart full of remorse, approached Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa with sandal paste and garlands of flowers made with her own hand, and worshipped him as an Incarnation of Shrī Gaurāṅga. She frankly apologized to him for her unbecoming conduct and implored his forgiveness. The Master also was delighted to see the innate goodness and greatness of the Brāhmaṇī reasserting themselves after a temporary eclipse. With a free conscience she then bade adieu to Kāmārpukur once for all and started for Banāras, the holy abode of Lord Vishwanātha, where she spent her days exclusively in spiritual exercises.

Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa met her at Banāras during one of his pilgrimages, and advised her to live at Vṛindāvan to the end. She accompanied him to that sacred place. She was now much advanced in years and soon passed away, leaving behind her a brilliant record of spiritual discipline and service for the inspiration of future seekers of Truth.

3. AGHORMAṆI DEVĪ

In the present scientific age, when nothing is accepted as true unless tested in the crucible of sensuous perception, the story of the hair-raising mystic experiences of Aghormaṇi Devī, better known as *Gopāler Mā* (Gopāla's Mother), and her unique spiritual relationship with Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa would sound like a veritable myth to a layman. But to a knower of Truth her life is a splendid revelation that there is a subtle realm which is far beyond the ken of earth-bound minds and is open only to the spiritual gaze of the fortunate few.

After Swāmī Vivekānanda's return from the West, three of his Western disciples, viz. Sister Niveditā, Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Sara C. Bull, once went on a pilgrimage to Kāmārhāṭī, on the eastern bank of the Ganges, about three miles to the north of Dakṣhiṇeshwar, to see Gopāla's Mother, one of the most revered women devotees of the Master. As was her wont, she received them very kindly and caressed them in the Indian motherly fashion by touching their chins, and in response to their request related some of her wonderful spiritual experiences. Swāmī Vivekānanda, on hearing from Niveditā her impressions of the venerable lady, significantly remarked, "Ah! this is the old India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away, never to return." Indeed, no true picture could be drawn of the India of the past as also of Gopāla's Mother, whose life was one long silent prayer, and epitomized the spiritual traditions of our forbears.

Aghormaṇi Devī was born in the year 1822 in a brahmin family at Kāmārhāṭī. According to orthodox traditions, her father Kāshīnāth Bhaṭṭāchārya gave her in marriage at the age of nine to a young man of very modest means in the village of Pāighāṭī, near Bodrā, in the district of 24-Parganās. But she became widowed almost immediately after her marriage. She was so young that she could hardly realize the implications of conjugal life, and after a brief stay in the house of her father-in-law she came back to her father's home. There her elder brother Nīlmādhav Bhaṭṭāchārya supported the family by acting as a priest in the temple of Shrī Rādhāmādhava at Kāmārhāṭī, which was built by Govinda Chandra Datta, a wealthy business man of Paṭalḍāṅgā, Calcutta. This temple with its beautiful flower garden and orchard became a centre of attraction to many a devout soul and also to Aghormaṇi, who began to frequent the shrine for worship and contemplation. It so happened that, after the death of Govinda Datta, his pious widow began to spend her days in that temple garden for spiritual practices.

Temperamentally god-fearing, Aghormaṇi found the associations of her brother's family too uncongenial for her. Through the grace of God, a new vista soon opened before her. Very much attracted by the devotion and purity of the mistress of the temple, she cultivated acquaintance with her, which shortly ripened into intimate friendship. Owing to their kinship of spirit, Aghormaṇi gladly accepted her invitation to reside in the temple garden permanently. To meet her personal expenses, she deposited with the mistress what little money she got by disposing of her share of the property in her father-in-law's house. She was given a small room inside the garden just on the bank of the Ganges exclusively for spiritual exercises. In the words of Sister Niveditā: "Her own little room was absolutely without comforts. Her bed was of stone, and her floor of stone, and the piece of matting she offered her guests to sit on, had to be taken down from a shelf and unrolled. The handful of parched rice and sugar candy that formed her only store, and were all that she could give in hospitality, were taken from an earthen pot that hung from the roof by a few cords. But the place was spotlessly clean, washed constantly by Ganges-water of her own sturdy carrying. And in a niche near her hand, lay an old copy of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* and her great horn spectacles, and the little white bag containing her beads. On those beads Gopāler Mā had become a saint! Hour after hour, day after day, for how many years, had she sat, day and night, absorbed in them!"

Aghormaṇi received initiation from a Vaiṣhṇava guru. Placed in favourable environments undisturbed by the din and bustle of this workaday world, her latent devotional sentiments gradually blossomed forth, and she bent all her energies to the realization of the cherished object of her worship. That tender love which had so long remained cooped up within and had not found any suitable outlet for expression, now welled up in torrents of tears, and made her almost sleepless. Day in and day out, her heart, agonized by the pangs of separation, yearned for a glimpse of Baby Kṛiṣhṇa, whom she looked upon as her dear child. In the intensity of spiritual longing she used to sit for meditation at three in the morning and continue telling her beads for the greater part of the day and far into the night, with small intervals for meals and rest as well as for the midday services of Shrī Rādhāmādhava in the temple. Her daily routine was thus one uniform round of prayer and service, which she followed with unabated zeal for long thirty years in the solitude of her room.

The fame of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa as a God-inebriated saint had by this time spread far and wide, and Aghormaṇi also came to know about it and felt a strong desire to see him. One autumn afternoon in 1884, accompanied by the devoted widow of Govinda Datta and another woman, she went to Dakṣhiṇeshwar. She was now about sixty-two and her mind was full of the thought of Gopāla. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was much delighted to see them, talked to them with all affection and candour, and sang a few devotional songs, which charmed Aghormaṇi and her companions beyond measure. He asked them to come again, and the widow of Govinda Datta also implored the Master in return to pay a visit to the temple of Kāmārhāṭī.

From the day of her first meeting Aghormaṇi was very much attracted towards Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, and felt a yearning to repeat the visit at the earliest opportunity. A few days later, she again went to Dakṣhiṇeshwar with some stale sweets purchased from a wayside shop. Scarcely had she crossed the threshold of the Master's room, when he said, "Oh, you have come ; give me what you have brought for me." With great hesitancy she opened the bundle and offered the sweets to him. He ate them all with great relish and said, "Well, you need not spend money for sweets. Prepare sweetened cocoa-nut balls and bring one or two for me when you come here ; or you may bring some vegetable curry cooked by your own hand." Aghormaṇi was deeply moved at the childlike behaviour of the Master, but was a little perplexed to find him always pressing for this or that curry. She said later on, "Instead of talks about God or religion, he spoke only about food. I thought, 'What a queer monk! He only talks of food! And I am a poor widow ; how can I feed him every day? Well, I must not come to him any more.' But as soon as I went outside the temple garden I again felt an uncontrollable pull towards him. And it was with great difficulty that I could return to Kāmārhāṭī." It was not long before she came again to Dakṣhiṇeshwar on foot with some curry of her own making ; Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa partook of it with great joy and extolled her skill in cooking. Aghormaṇi could hardly restrain her tears at his appreciation of the paltry thing she had prepared and so hesitatingly brought for him. During the next three or four months she visited the Master very frequently, every time with a curry prepared according to his direction. Sometimes she would think in disgust, "O Gopāla, is this the result of my constant prayer? You have brought me to a monk who always hankers for food. I shall not come here any more." But her resolution could not resist for long the tremendous attraction she felt to see him again. Like one possessed, she constantly dwelt upon the thought of the saint and could not get rid of it in spite of herself. In the meantime, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, to redeem his promise, went once to Kāmārhāṭī to see Shrī Rādhāmādhava, and passed long hours in singing devotional songs, in the course of which he fell into frequent trances.

Time thus rolled on unnoticed, and Aghormaṇi plunged deeper and deeper into the thought of Gopāla. Her ardent longing matured and brought about a spirit of utter self-abnegation in her. Time was now ripe for the fulfilment of her desire. In the spring of 1884, one morning she got up as usual to tell her beads. After finishing her repetition of the *mantra,* scarcely had she surrendered the fruit of it to her chosen deity, when she found, to her astonishment, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa sitting on her left side with a smiling face and his right hand clenched. Her curiosity being roused, she stretched her hand to touch him. But the figure vanished, and in its place there was Gopāla (Baby Kṛiṣhṇa), aged about ten months, who crawled forward raising one arm and fixing his bewitching gaze on her, and begged for butter. Says Aghormaṇi: "I was so surprised! I cried in an excess of joy and said to him, 'Alas! I am a poor widow. Where shall I get butter and evaporated milk for you, my child?' But Gopāla would not listen. 'Give me something to eat,' he said again and again. With tears in my eyes, I got up and brought for him some dry sweetened cocoa-nut balls I had. Gopāla sat on my lap, snatched away my rosary, jumped on my shoulders and moved about in the room, so that all my efforts to carry on further repetition of the *mantra* were baffled."

With the first streak of light the next morning, Aghormaṇi started for Dakṣhiṇeshwar, with Gopāla clasped to her bosom, his tiny, ruddy feet dangling gracefully. What a joy! The long cherished object of her life was a tangible reality today. She walked the whole distance in a state of absorption, with dishevelled hair, staring eyes and the hem of her cloth trailing the ground. Immediately on reaching the temple gate, she began to call, "Gopāla, Gopāla!" It was a heavenly sight. As soon as she took her seat in the Master's room, the latter in an ecstatic mood sat like a little child on her lap. Tears rolled down her cheeks, and she began to feed the Master with milk crust, butter and other delicacies she had brought with her. After a while he returned to his bedstead. The blessed Aghormaṇi began to dance in joy, being totally oblivious of all about her, since her mind was then in the empyrean realm of Gopāla. She talked to Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa in a manner quite unintelligible to ordinary people. She said, "Here is Gopāla on my lap," "Now he enters your body," "There, he has come out again," "Come, my darling, come to your poor mother." Thus overpowered with emotion, she was transported into a superconscious state that raised her above rigid social conventions. From now on, Aghormaṇi came to be addressed by Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa and others as *Gopāler Mā* (Gopāla's Mother), inasmuch as she actually became the blessed mother of Gopāla, the Child Kṛishṇa of the eternal Vṛindāvana, where only pure and selfless minds are privileged to enjoy perennial bliss in mystic communion with the Divine.

Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa expressed great joy at this wonderful state of hers, stroked her chest to quiet her and fed her with whatever delicacies there were in the room. While eating, she went on saying in an exalted mood: "Gopāla, my child, your poor mother passed her days in this birth in great distress; she had to live on the sale proceeds of the holy thread which she made out of yarn she spun with a spindle; is it therefore that you are caressing me so much today!" and so on. The Master detained her the whole day with him, made her bathe and have her food, and when she had quieted down a little, sent her back home in the evening.

On her return journey also she visualized Baby Kṛishṇa resting in her arms. Reaching her room at Kāmārhāṭī, she could hardly sit for meditation, for Gopāla would gambol before her eyes or snatch away her rosary, giving no rest to her. So, desisting from the attempt, she went to bed with Gopāla by her side. But the naughty child complained of the hard bed and would not lie without a pillow. At last, putting his little head on her left arm and drawing him close to her bosom, she tried to comfort him by saying that she would bring him a soft pillow the next morning. But Gopāla would not give her a moment's respite. Later, when she collected fuel for cooking, he would assist her in the work and also play tricks on her. The mother, with a heart overflowing with love, sometimes fondled the child and sometimes rebuked him for his naughtiness. Thus a divine sport went on in the sacred temple garden of Kāmārhāṭī—a phenomenon so rare in this materialistic age.

After a couple of months, when the intensity of feeling subsided considerably, her vision of Gopāla became less frequent, which was very much regretted by her. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa consoled her by saying that in the Kali Yuga (Iron Age) the physical frame would drop like a sere leaf, if the mind remained constantly attuned to the highest plane of superconsciousness. He also assured her that she had no further need for meditation, since the supreme object of her aspiration had been attained, and that she would be blessed with a vision of Baby Kṛiṣhṇa whenever she would strongly like to have it. However, to break her monotony, she would take up the rosary and engage herself in repeating the Lord's name as before for the well-being of her Gopāla, who, she now fully realized, was none other than Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa himself. As days went on, she felt the presence of Gopāla in everything; all distinction between the high and the low, the touchable and the untouchable, and all scrupulousness in the matter of food and ceremonial cleanliness vanished altogether from her mind. The Master, witnessing this marvellous change, once said to her, "You have achieved the impossible; such a realization as yours is rare in this age."

The devotees of the Master were captivated by the personality of Gopāla's Mother, and also drew much inspiration from the divine sports he played with her. Once in 1885, when the Car Festival was being celebrated in the house of Balarām Bose of Bāghbāzār in Calcutta, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa suddenly assumed the posture of Baby Kṛiṣhṇa in the presence of a large number of devotees. Nobody could divine the cause for this sudden change in his mood. But in a little while the carriage of Gopāla's Mother reached the gate of the house, and she came upstairs to find the Master as her chosen deity. Everybody marvelled at her devotion and paid her great reverence. She, however, said, "But I don't like this kind of wooden stiffness through divine fervour. My Gopāla will laugh, play, walk and run; but what is this—almost like a log! I don't care to see this sort of Gopāla!"

One day Gopāla's Mother and Narendranāth (afterwards Swamī Vivekānanda) were present at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. The Master, for fun, asked the two devotes to compare notes. They were almost diametrically opposite in temperament and ideas. Narendranāth was a rationalist, nurtured from boyhood in Western science and philosophy and a believer in the formless aspect of God, whereas Gopāla's Mother, innocent of any knowledge of philosophy, was simplicity personified and a worshipper of the personal God with name and form. The Master asked her to narrate all about her vision of Baby Kṛishṇa. With great hesitation she recounted in the midst of tears how she was first blessed with the vision of Gopāla and all her subsequent thrilling experiences. She did it with such pathos that Narendranāth could not restrain his tears. The widow knew that Naren was a great scholar. So she asked him whether her visions were true or a mere figment of imagination. Narendra assured her that they were all true—true to the letter.

When Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa passed away in 1886, it was a terrible shock to Gopāla's Mother. For a long time she did not step out of the garden at Kāmārhāṭī and passed her days exclusively in contemplation. Her sorrow, however, was partially relieved when she again began to have visions of the Master as before. She was now far advanced in years, and spent the last days of her life in prayer, paying occasional visits to the Rāmakṛishṇa monastery at Barnagore, Ālambāzār or Belur, and found great pleasure in conversing with the Master's devotees, lay and monastic. One day, on the occasion of the Car Festival at Māhesh, near Serampore, she had a wonderful vision. She saw her Gopāla manifested everywhere—in the car, in the deity and in the vast concourse of pilgrims. All appeared to her as different manifestations of her Gopāla! The vision made her almost mad with joy.

How she remained always absorbed in the thought of Gopāla and constantly felt his living presence, is further illustrated by the following instance. Once Swāmī Brahmānanda, the spiritual son of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, sent one of his disciples to Kāmārhāṭī with some fruits and vegetables for her. The disciple passed the night in the same room with the saintly lady. Towards the close of the night, he heard her talking, as if to a child: "Well, let there be dawn. Birds have not yet shaken off their sleep and begun to cry. Wait, my darling, wait. You will bathe when the day breaks." In the morning the devotee asked her with whom she had been talking at night.

She readily replied, "Why, don't you know that Gopāla lives with me? I was talking with him."

In 1904 Gopāla's Mother fell seriously ill and had to be removed for treatment to the house of Balarām Bose in Calcutta. Sister Niveditā had been so charmed with her loving nature and spiritual experiences that she subsequently took her to her own residence at 17, Bosepārā Lane, Bāghbāzār, and served her with a daughter's love and care till the last moment of her life. She considered herself lucky to have the privilege of serving such an illumined soul for a pretty long time. During this period the Holy Mother, who lived in a rented house at 2/1, Bāghbāzār Street, not far off, would occasionally come to Niveditā's house to see Gopāla's Mother, whose condition was becoming alarming day by day. Two days before the actual passing away, she came again and sat by her. Being informed of her presence, Gopāla's Mother very slowly muttered: "Gopāla, have you come? Come, come, Gopāla. So long you sat on my lap, but today it is your turn to take me into your lap." When her head was placed on the Holy Mother's lap, the latter lovingly stroked her body. Both remained mute for some time. Then Gopāla's Mother, who felt the presence of her Baby Kṛiṣhṇa in the Mother, said in a plaintive tone, "So long, O Gopāla, you have washed my feet and spread the seat for me. Today you are to put the dust of your feet on my forehead." The attendant executed this desire of hers, and the Holy Mother passed into a trance.

Gopāla's Mother was soon taken in an unconscious state to the bank of the Ganges. "Without a single want she lay there," writes Sister Niveditā, "as she had lived, the mind suspended in the thought that had made its life, the face full of the last sweetness and peace." After a day and a night had been spent there, the dying form was placed lower down, with the feet touching the sacred waters. Then the last breath was gone. "The spirit" of Gopāla's Mother "had taken flight, and only the garment of flesh was left behind." The 8th of July, 1906, thus closed the last chapter of the thrilling life of one of the greatest women of India in the field of spirituality.

4. YOGĪNDRA MOHINĪ BISHWĀS

The life of Yogīndra Mohinī Bishwās, familiarly known as Yogīn Mā, reminds us of the women seers of the Vedic times, whose superb spiritual attainments have made them immortal in the history of India. She combined in her personality great poise and sweetness with a spirit of service and rare spiritual wisdom. Yogīn Mā was destined to live in society a silent, unostentatious life shedding joy and peace all around. Truly did Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa say about her, "Yogīn is not an ordinary bud blossoming quickly, but the bud of a thousand-petalled lotus opening slowly."

The early name of Yogīn Mā was Yogīndra Mohinī Mitra. She was born on the 16th January, 1851, in north Calcutta. Her father Prasanna Kumār Mitra lived on Bāghbāzār Street and was a well-to-do physician, who had earned a reputation in midwifery, of which he was a successful professor as well in the Medical College of Calcutta.

Though born with silver spoon in her mouth, Yogīn Mā soon fell a victim to one of the social tragedies of Bengal. At the age of six or seven, she was given in marriage to Ambikā Charaṇ Bishwās, a handsome youth of the illustrious zemindar family of Khardāh, in 24-Parganās, noted all over Bengal for its piety and large charities. The young Ambikā Charaṇ, who inherited a vast property from his father, soon gave himself up to excesses and became a moral wreck. He squandered his fortune in a very short time and virtually became a beggar. The married life of Yogīndra Mohinī thus became a chapter of unmitigated tribulations. She began to bemoan her lot; her heart recoiled in disgust from a prodigal husband who rolled in iniquity. It was now time for her to make a final decision as to whether or not to remain in his vicious company. She had only one daughter, who had the pet name of Gaṇu, her male child having expired within six months of its birth. With the marriage of Gaṇu, Yogīn Mā's responsibility as a housewife was over. She bade adieu to her father-in-law's house and came back with her personal belongings to her paternal house at Bāghbāzār to live with her widowed mother.

This was a great turning point in her life. The romantic picture of a peaceful and happy domestic life was shattered to pieces, and there was nothing left to fill the great void she now felt in her mind. A deep anxiety about how to spend the rest of her forlorn life made her restless. While she was passing through this mental storm, divine dispensation soon solved her problem and opened a new vista before her. Balarām Bose, a devotee of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, lived near by and was distantly related to her on her father-in-law's side. One day, on the occasion of the Master's visit to his house, he took Yogīn Mā to his residence. The Master was at that time reeling like a drunkard under the impact of his divine emotions. Yogīn Mā, who had a bitter experience of her tipsy husband, could scarcely entertain a high opinion of this godman. But as she came in closer contact with him, her first impression of him as a drunken worshipper of Kālī was completely eliminated from her mind. All her mental unrest quieted down, and a fresh horizon of hope opened up before her. She forged ahead with renewed enthusiasm for the fulfilment of her new-born hankering for supreme spiritual peace. The *Devīmantra* (sacred name of the Goddess) with which she had long been initiated by the preceptor of her father-in-law's family, received a confirmation from her new divine guide Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa and became a veritable asset to her.

After a few visits to Dakṣhiṇeshwar, Yogīn Mā became acquainted with the Holy Mother. At the very first sight, both became attracted to each other. The Holy Mother once said, "Yogen is my Jayā[2]—my attendant maid, my comrade, my companion"—so deep was her affection for Yogīn Mā! She felt greatly relieved to have Yogīn Mā by her side as her confidante. Speaking about the Holy Mother, Yogīn Mā said, "Whenever I went to the Mother, she took me into her confidence and unbosomed all her secrets to me and even sought my counsel. I used to visit Dakṣhiṇeshwar at intervals of seven or eight days and sometimes spent nights there. The Mother would not allow me to sleep separately. She would drag me to her side and make me sleep with her at the *nahabat* (music-tower). This acquaintance soon ripened into the deepest love for each other, and a moment's separation seemed painful. Some time after my first visit, the Mother had to go to her native village. I stood waiting on the bank of the Ganges and watched her with wistful eyes till the boat carrying her vanished out of sight. After returning to the *nahabat*, I wept profusely, being unable to bear the pangs of separation from her. Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, on his way back from the *pañchavaṭī* (the grove of five sacred trees), noticed it, and after returning to his room sent for me. 'You are very much pained by separation from her,' he said tenderly, and began to console me by recounting the marvellous spiritual experiences he had had through Tāntrika *sādhanā* (practice). When the Mother returned after about a year and a half, he said to her, 'The girl with nice large eyes who comes very frequently loves you very much. She wept bitterly at the *nahabat* on the day of your departure for home.' The Mother replied, 'Yes, I know her quite well. Her name is Yogen.' ".

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[2] One of the two principal attendants of the goddess Durgā, the other being Vijayā.

As days rolled on, Yogīn Mā's hunger for God-realization increased, and she strove with greater fervour to plunge deeper into spiritual practices. The unparalleled lives of the Master and the Holy Mother served only to inflame her zeal. Encouraged by Ṣhrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, she also devoted herself to a study of the chief Purāṇas, the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahābhārata* and the life of Shrī Chaitanya. She was gifted with a prodigious memory and could recount faithfully the salient incidents mentioned in those books and quote with ease passages from the last named one. Sister Niveditā has acknowledged in the preface to her *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* her indebtedness to Yogīn Mā in the preparation of the same, so precise and profound was her acquaintance with the sacred literature of the Hindus! Swāmī Sāradānanda also records in his immortal life of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa many valuable incidents as told by Yogīn Mā, whose close association with the Master enabled her to speak about them with authority. As a matter of fact, through the grace of the Master, Yogīn Mā rose step by step to spiritual heights that were the despair of many.

She once took her aged mother and daughter to the Master, and they were highly pleased to listen to his soul-stirring utterances. She also induced her husband Ambikā Charaṇ to associate with him, as a result of which Ambikā tried to turn over a new leaf. But after some time he had a dog-bite, got fever and died. During the last few days, Yogīn Mā, following the Master's instruction to her that a wife had duties to a husband, even if reprobate, had brought him to her paternal home and carefully nursed him till the end.

On the 28th July, 1885, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa paid a visit to her house. She begged him to take refreshments in her bedroom, saying, with a conviction that was her own, that the room would be converted into Banāras if he kindly set his foot in it, so that if she happened to die there, she would forthwith attain liberation. Her desire was granted.

Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa passed away in 1886, which dealt a stunning blow to Yogīn Mā, who was then practising *tapasyā* (austerity) at Vṛindāvan. She was overwhelmed with grief for not having been able to see him during his last illness. The Holy Mother joined her there immediately after the event. Yogīn Mā said, "The moment the Holy Mother saw me, she hugged me to her bosom and began to shed profuse tears for her separation from the Master. Both of us became so disconsolate that our days passed in lamentations, and we could hardly attend to our daily needs. One day the Master appeared before us and said, 'Well, why do you weep so much? Here I am; where have I gone? It is just like passing from this room to that.' These words reassured us and lessened the intensity of our grief to a considerable extent."

At Vṛindāvan, Yogīn Mā spent most of her time in meditation and *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name). One evening she became so absorbed in contemplation at Lālā Bābu's temple that she lost all outward consciousness. The evening service was long over, but still she sat motionless like a statue. The priest tried to bring her back to the sense-plane, since it was time to close the gate of the temple, but all efforts proved abortive. The Holy Mother became anxious at her residence about Yogīn Mā's unusual delay in returning, and sent Swāmī Yogānanda with a lantern in search of her. The Swāmī, who knew her usual place of meditation, went straight to the temple and found her buried in a trance. It was with great difficulty that she could be brought back to the normal plane. Referring to this Yogīn Mā said afterwards, "Then my mind had plunged so deep into meditation that I had totally forgotten the existence of the world. . . . I could visualize the presence of my *iṣhṭa* (chosen deity) everywhere. This lasted for three days." This was not the first instance of its kind. While at her paternal home, she had also fallen into such a trance. On hearing of this, Swāmī Vivekānanda once said to her, "Yogīn Mā, you will pass away in *samādhi* (superconscious state), for once a person experiences this blessed state, the memory of it is revived at the time of his death."

She had two images of Gopāla (Child Kṛiṣhṇa). She worshipped them with such love that she used to see them in their living radiant forms during meditation. They talked and sported with her and even importuned her for sweets. "One day," she herself has said, "while I was engaged in worship, two exquisitely handsome boys came smiling, threw their arms round me and patting me on the back said, 'Do you know who we are?' I said, 'Certainly I do: you are the valiant Balarāma, and you are Kṛishṇa.' The younger of the two said, 'You won't remember us.' 'Why?' I asked. 'On account of them,' he replied, pointing to my grandsons." Really, after the death of her daughter, she became so busy for a time with taking care of her three helpless grandsons that her meditations became less deep.

Her whole life was full of fasts and vigils. She willingly subjected herself to all forms of discipline to bring about a quick spiritual unfoldment. In the garden-house of Nīlāmbar Mookerji at Belur, she performed, along with the Holy Mother, a very difficult form of spiritual practice called *pañchatapā*, with flaming fires on four sides and the burning sun overhead. Once she gave up drinking water for six months, taking only milk instead. She also spent a whole winter on the strand of Prayāga, the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā at Allāhābād. With single-minded devotion she maintained this spirit of austerity almost to the last days of her life. She became formally initiated into *sannyāsa* (monasticism) by Swāmī Sāradānanda at Purī, though she put on the saffron robe only at the time of worship.

With clock-like regularity she followed for long a fixed routine. Says Sister Devamātā in her *Days in an Indian Monastery*: "Every morning she rose at four and went to bathe in the Ganges. Then she cared for her aged mother, and at about half past seven she came to the Holy Mother's house. Here she sat in the store-room . . . and cut the vegetables for the day's curry. Later she performed the worship in the Holy Mother's shrine and served the noon meal to the household.

"After this she returned to her mother, coming again at the evening hour to conduct *ārati* and serve the evening meal. She never neglected the least duty or varied her routine according to her mood. She seemed to have only one unchanging mood, which took outward form in fervent devotion to her Master and loving care of his children. She expressed little, but within was a glowing flame of spiritual ardour."

The Holy Mother used to say to her women devotees, "Yogen and Golāp have done so much *sādhanā* (spiritual practice): It will do you good to discuss it amongst yourselves. She is a great *tapaswinī* (performer of austerities)."

Her house was the happy resort of many distinguished disciples of the Master. During the Jagaddhātrī-*pūjā* (worship), the Holy Mother, if she happened to be in Calcutta, as well as Swāmī Vivekānanda, Swāmī Yogānanda and others used to go to her house and take part in the festivities. Swāmī Vivekānanda, who was fond of the dishes prepared by her, asked her now and then to cook dainties for him according to his taste.

Yogīn Mā, as we have seen, did not always remain confined to Calcutta. She visited many of the famous places of pilgrimage throughout the country. She also lived several times with the Holy Mother at her birth-place, Jayrāmbāṭī, or at Kāmārpukur, the birth-place of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. Her life of austerity, her long association with the holy couple, her loving service rendered to them as also to the monastic disciples of the Master, her charities and, above all, her regular habits of meditation, *japa* and study—all contributed to the exaltation of her life. So did the Holy Mother say, "Yogen is a *jñānin* (possessor of wisdom) among women."

The Holy Mother passed away in July, 1920, and, with her, the last mooring of Yogīn Mā's life was removed. Her health broke down under this blow, and she now yearned for eternal union with the Master and the Mother. Three years after this, in spite of her failing health, she accompanied Swāmī Sāradānanda to Jayrāmbāṭī to attend the consecration ceremony of the Holy Mother's memorial temple on 19th April, 1923. During the last two years of her life she had much physical suffering. But her mind dwelt constantly on things divine, and she very often passed into ecstatic states after repeating the name of Gopāla. Her aged frame, however, could hardly bear such strain, and finally on the 4th June, 1924, she passed into eternity.

Thus ended the eventful career of this woman devotee of rare spiritual eminence. "Such lives," says Sister Devamātā, "are like a lake or a river. The sun may draw up its waters, but they fall again to refresh the earth. So these saintly ones in body may be lifted from our sight, but their holy influence falls back upon us to revive our fainting hearts, and give us new spiritual life, new strength of purpose."

5. Golāp Sundarī Devī

Golāp Sundarī Devī, addressed afterwards by all as Golāp Mā, was born of a brahmin family in north Calcutta. Though brought up in the midst of orthodox traditions, she, as her subsequent life would show, was quite liberal in her ideas. Her conjugal life was not a happy one ; misfortunes dogged her at every step and rendered her early days extremely miserable. Her husband died while she was still young, leaving behind him a son and a daughter. Very soon her little son was snatched away by death. To fill the cup of her misery, her only daughter Chaṇḍī, who was beautiful and possessed of good qualities, and had been given in marriage to the celebrated Saurīndra Mohan Tagore of Pāthuriāghāṭā, Calcutta, in contravention of the rigid caste system, also expired shortly. No blow could be more severe than this. Having almost none to call her own, she felt herself utterly forlorn.

Thus weighed down by terrible mishaps, she had no alternative but to look up to the Lord for solace. In response, as it were, to her silent appeal, the much needed relief soon came from an unexpected quarter. Yogīn Mā happened to be her neighbour. With a heavy heart Golāp Mā saw her and felt much relieved by unburdening her mind to her. Yogīn Mā, realizing her excruciating mental suffering, took her one day to the saint at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. This meeting made a profound impression upon her. Sitting at his feet, Golāp Mā gave vent to her feelings and eventually burst into tears. The Master listened to her with the deepest sympathy and, like a master-physician, administered a spiritual anodyne. He told her that she was extremely lucky in having none but the Lord to engage her attention. These bereavements, he said, were a blessing in disguise, inasmuch as she was now entirely free from the tentacles of the world and could devote herself exclusively to the contemplation of God—a privilege that rarely fell to mortals. The words of the Master went deep into her heart and brought about a complete metamorphosis in her outlook. She came to realize the vanity of earthly possessions that only made one forget the real mission of human life. Through the grace of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, the poignancy of her grief was almost gone, and in the course of a few days there remained no trace of it in her mind. She began to look upon him as her supreme object of love and worship. The Master introduced her to the Holy Mother, who lived at that time in the *nahabat* (music-tower). Thus Golāp Mā, so long tossed to and fro by the adverse currents of life, found a haven of peace where she could rest secure.

Golāp Mā lived with her brothers and sister in a dilapidated brick-built house in the northern part of Calcutta. She felt a strong urge to invite Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa once to her humble home, so that it might be sanctified by the touch of his holy feet. One day she got the glad tidings that the Master would be coming to her humble dwelling on the 28th July, 1885, after visiting the house of Nanda Basu. In anticipation of the great moment, Golāp Mā was excitedly going out and coming in to see if he had arrived. Being unable to brook any further delay, she hastened to the residence of Nanda Basu to inquire. But the Master had in the meantime reached her place by another route. On her return, Golāp Mā was overwhelmed with emotion and burst out, "Well, I cannot contain myself for joy.... All my grief at the loss of Chaṇḍī is now gone.... Well, I shall run to Yogīn to apprise her of my good fortune."

The poor widow continued: "A porter got a lakh of rupees in a lottery by paying only one rupee for a ticket. But he died immediately to hear of this happy news, so intense was his joy! Really the man died! My condition is exactly like that. Pray bless me all of you; otherwise I shall also die!"

Golāp Mā was intently looking at the Master and the devotees, and remained pinned to the spot, being totally oblivious of her duties in the household. Her sister's reminder on this point made no impression on her. After a while, when her emotion subsided, she offered the Master the sweets prepared for him and treated the devotees also.

The Master then proceeded to the house of Yogīn Mā, and after spending about two hours there went for rest to the house of Balarām Bose, one of his foremost devotees. Golāp Mā followed him to both these places, so deeply was she caught by his magnetic spell.

Golāp Mā became one of the closest companions of the Holy

Mother. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa asked the latter to take particular care of this brahmin widow, who, he said, would follow her like a shadow throughout her life. This prophecy of the Master was literally fulfilled. Indeed, Golāp Mā served the Holy Mother with unflinching devotion for long thirty-six years. During the Master's last illness, she lived with the Mother both at Shyāmpukur and the Cossipore garden for his service. But his passing away was a stunning blow to her and made her utterly disconsolate. In the company of the Holy Mother, she went to Vṛindāvan, via Banāras, and practised hard austerities there for about a year. She became almost a constant companion to the Mother, and visited with her many places of pilgrimage, including Rāmeshwar in south India. The Holy Mother used to say, "I cannot go to any place without Golāp. I feel assured when she is with me."

After the demise of the Master, the Holy Mother became the special object of her care and attention. She protected the Mother from the unreasonable importunities and frenzied devotion of particular devotees. Once, when one of them started to perform ceremonial worship of the Holy Mother, she felt uncomfortable. Golāp Mā, happening upon the scene, became furious and sharply asked him if he was worshipping a wooden or stone image. Thus, whether at the Belur Maṭh or at the Holy Mother's Calcutta residence, in the house of devotees or at Jayrāmbāṭī, she was to be found a watchful attendant of the Mother, knowing exactly what she required. While getting into or alighting from a carriage, it was Golāp Mā who would help her. Sometimes the Mother would hold, like a child, a corner of Golāp Mā's cloth while going on foot from one place to another. She was, as it were, the mistress of the Mother's extensive household, after the devotees had begun to come in large numbers.

Golāp Mā's daily life at this stage consisted uniformly of prayer and service. She lived in the Calcutta residence of the Holy Mother, where from early morning till bedtime she kept herself engaged in ministering to the Mother and her spiritual children. Getting up at 4 A.M., she carried on *japa* and meditation for about three hours in her own room, then took out stores for the day's cooking and dressed vegetables and afterwards went to the Ganges for a bath in the company of the Holy Mother. While returning, she would bring a small pitcher of Ganges water to be used in worship, dress more vegetables and prepare a large number of betel-rolls. Next she would distribute the sacramental food among the devotees and servants. After the midday meal she would take a little rest, and in the afternoon devote some time to the study of the *Mahābhārata,* the *Gītā* and the Rāmakṛiṣhṇa-Vivekānanda literature. When the evening service was over, she would take up the rosary and continue her *japa* and meditation in her room till about 9-30 P.M. A little later she would have her supper and then retire for the night. This unceasing stream of work she did in a spirit of service to the Lord. The Holy Mother used to say, "What a tremendous amount of meditation and *japa* Golāp and Yogen have done! Golāp has become illumined through *japa.*"

Golāp Mā loved orderliness. If any monastic inmate left soiled clothes where they should not be, she would have them cleaned and kept in their proper place. She hated waste, for the Holy Mother deprecated it. So she would exchange old and unusable utensils for new ones. The leavings of the plates after the devotees had finished their meals, and the peelings of vegetables, she used to deposit on the street, so that cows might eat them. She would save the stalks of betel leaves for the guinea-pigs in the house, since they were fond of them. And so on with other things.

She was exceedingly kind-hearted and charitable. Half of her meagre monthly income of rupees ten she spent in removing the needs of the poor, who knew that no matter when they came, their appeal for help would be attended to by her. She would arrange for the treatment of sick poor neighbours, sometimes running into debt for such acts of charity. Yet she herself would not accept any service from others, unless she was in great difficulty.

She was extremely outspoken. She would plainly express her opinion whenever she found something that militated against the established custom. She would not even spare the Holy Mother, who, however, put up with her criticisms, knowing that they were spoken from the heart. But the Mother was apprehensive of the unpleasant effects of such plain-speaking on others, and warned her now and then, saying that an unpalatable truth should never be told. Golāp Mā's unquestioning submission to her decision on such occasions was exemplary.

A salient trait of her character was her calm indifference to praise or blame, from whatever quarter it might come. Though born in a brahmin family, she got over caste prejudices as well as considerations of ceremonial purity or its opposite. Everyone down to the outcast was to her an object of love and worship. So the Holy Mother said, "Golāp's mind is very pure. Once, while at Vṛindāvan, we found the floor of the temple of Mādhavjī dirtied by some child. Golāp, seeing the inconvenience of all visitors, at once tore a portion of her new cloth and with it cleansed the spot. Some amongst the bystanders misjudged her, while others truly appraised this voluntary service. Even here, if she finds the steps to the Ganges dirtied, she would find some rags, clean the spot and wash it with jugfuls of water—all for the good of the public.... Mental purity is the outcome of a good deal of austerities practised in previous lives." On another occasion she said of Golāp Mā, "This is her last birth."

Golāp Mā lived for four years after the passing away of the Holy Mother. She was a veritable mother to the monks and novices living at latter's Calcutta residence, and looked to their minutest needs so long as she was physically fit to do it. But her health soon broke down under the strain of excessive labour and continuous austerities, and she awaited the final union with the Master with serenity. On the 19th December, 1924, Golāp Mā passed into eternal rest at about the age of sixty, leaving behind the sweet aroma of her affectionate personality and the peace of her saintly soul.

6. GAURĪ MĀ

A genius is born, not made. This is found amply illustrated in the life of Gaurī Mā. Her splendid services in the field of religion and education are an eloquent testimony to her constructive intellect and synthetic vision as also to her ability to respond boldly to the call of the times.

She was born in 1857, the fourth child of Shrī Pārvatī Charaṇ Chaṭṭopādhyāy, an inhabitant of Sibpur, Howrah and was named Mṛiḍānī. Her mother Giribālā Devī, after the death of her parents, inherited the property of her maternal grandfather in south Calcutta, and mostly lived there to look after it since she had no brother. Mṛiḍānī also lived with her and was brought up there from childhood. Giribālā, like her husband, possessed a religious frame of mind and was respected by all for her spiritual attainments and scholarship. She was well versed in Bengali and Sanskrit, and knew a little of English and Persian. She also composed hundreds of Bengali songs and a few Sanskrit hymns. Needless to say, Mṛiḍānī's life and character were profoundly influenced by this dynamic personality.

From her early life, Mṛiḍānī showed a strong tendency towards the worship of the gods and goddesses. Her love of charity, sympathy for the poor and dislike for worldly enjoyments prognosticated a career dedicated to the service of God and humanity at large. At a very tender age she was enrolled in the local Missionary school. Though exceptionally intelligent, her education did not proceed far ; for she could not put up with the attitude of the Christian teachers towards Hinduism, though Miss Maria Milman, sister of the then Lord Bishop of Calcutta and one of the organizers of this school, liked the girl very much and expressed a desire to take her to England for higher education. The mind of Mṛiḍānī recoiled from such an exotic culture, and she left school in sheer disgust once for all. She had by this time learnt by heart many Sanskrit hymns, the *Gītā* and *Chaṇḍī* as also many passages of the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahābhārata* and the Sanskrit grammar *Mugdhabodha.* She also had her initiation at the age of about ten from a highly spiritual brahmin, whom she had once casually met in her home. She, moreover, began to spend much time in the worship of the sacred stone emblem of Shrī Kṛishṇa (named Dāmodara), which she received as a loving present from a spiritually gifted woman who came from Vṛindāvan and stayed in the family for some days. This emblem became the lifelong companion and the dearest object of worship to Mṛiḍānī.

These religious tendencies of the girl alarmed her mother and other relatives and prompted them to make hurried preparations for her marriage in order to divert her attention from spiritual pursuits. She was only in her thirteenth year, but she had by this time developed a great distaste for marriage. When she came to know of what was going on, she said to her mother, "I shall marry only that bridegroom who is immortal"—meaning thereby that she wanted to be wedded to Shrī Kṛishṇa. On the appointed day, when all arrangements for the ceremony were complete, she was kept confined to a room lest she should run away. But this coercion made her furious. Eluding the strictest vigilance of her relatives, she somehow managed to escape at night and thus all preparations for the marriage came to naught. However, in a day or two she was found out, but was never afterwards pressed for marriage.

These impediments served only to inflame her passion for God-realization. She sought for an opportunity to leave home and plunge into a life of meditation in a solitary place far away. An opportunity soon presented itself. About the age of eighteen she was going on a pilgrimage to Gaṅgāsāgar in the company of some of her relatives. Suddenly she broke away from the party unnoticed, and reached Hardwār after a strenuous journey with a group of up-country monks and nuns. Henceforth she shunned the society of householders and travelled from place to place to satisfy her spiritual hunger, sometimes in dense forests bristling with hardships and dangers. In her inner delight she forgot all about the fatigues of the body. With the stone emblem of Dāmodara hanging from her neck, and the *Gītā,* the *Chaṇḍī,* the *Bhāgavata* and pictures of Shṛī Gaurāṅga and Mother Kālī as well as a few articles of everyday use in her bag, she visited in the course of a few years numerous sacred places such as Kedārnāth, Badrīnārāyaṇ, Jwālāmukhī, Amarnāth, Vṛindāvan, Dwārakā and Purī.

The tale of her experiences during these tours in the mountains and plains makes fascinating reading. From now on she wore the ochre cloth. To hide her identity, sometimes she covered her body with clay and ashes, or dressed as a male with a flowing garment and turban, or posed as a lunatic. Everywhere her one concern was the realization of God. In some places associated with Shrī Kṛishṇa such as Dwārakā, she had wonderful spiritual experiences, and she had some miraculous escapes, too.[3]

Mṛiḍānī first heard about Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa from Balarām Bose of Bāghbāzār. At Purī also she had a glowing account of the Master from an eye-witness. When she returned to Calcutta in 1882, she stayed with Balarām, who spoke to her about the spiritual ecstasies and realizations of the Master and insisted on her once visiting him.

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[3] This article is mainly based on a Bengali work entitled *Gaurī Mā,* published by Sāradeshwarī Āshrama. From an early letter of Swāmī Vivekānanda, however, it appears that for a time Gaurī Mā lived a householder's life also.

She said, "I will not go unless drawn by your holy man." Strangely enough, shortly after this, while proceeding to worship her chosen deity, she saw two living feet on the sacred seat where she kept the emblem of Dāmodara. Thrice she offered *tulasī* (basil) leaves to the deity, and every time they dropped at those feet. At this she fell down senseless. She came to herself after several hours, but could not speak. Only she felt as if an invisible thread was pulling her heart. Day and night passed in this way. Seeing her plight, Balarām took her before daybreak, with his wife and a few other ladies, to Dakṣhiṇeshwar. They found Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa winding thread on a stick and singing a song about Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa, which he stopped on their arrival. The irresistible pull which Mṛiḍanī had been feeling ceased suddenly, and while saluting the Master, she was startled to recognize the very same feet she had seen. She now understood the source of her mysterious experience. The Master inquired of her from Balarām, and showed that he already knew her in his own inexplicable way. When the party took leave, he tenderly asked Mṛiḍānī to come again.

The next morning Gaurī Mā (we shall henceforth call her by this familiar name) came alone to Dakṣhiṇeshwar. With great fervour she told Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa many things about herself. The Master took her to the music-tower, where the Holy Mother was living. Thereafter Gaurī Mā lived from time to time there with her. She now dedicated herself to the service of the Master. She would prepare delicacies and feed him with the greatest care. In the music-tower, she would sing in a sweet voice lofty spiritual songs, which would throw the Master into deep trances. Once she had a desire to witness the flood of divine emotion called *mahābhāva*, which was so frequently manifested in Shrī Gaurāṅga. It was fulfilled in an unexpected way. One day Gaurī Mā came to the Master's room with a dish of food in her hand. Scarcely had he tasted it, when he stood up in a state of ecstasy. Gaurī Mā and others present in the room were all caught in the current of divine thrill that pervaded the atmosphere. This intoxication continued till Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa touched all and brought them to the normal plane. Gaurī Mā's idea about his identity with Shrī Gaurāṅga was thus strengthened.

One early morning, when the sun was just rising, the Master, finding Gaurī Mā engaged in culling flowers from the garden, said, "Well, Gaurī, I am pouring water, you knead the clay." Seeing that she took it in a literal sense, he smiled and said, "Oh, you entirely misunderstand me. The women of this country are in a sad plight. You must work for them." Gaurī Mā could not reconcile herself to this idea of working in noisy, crowded cities. So she expressed her willingness to train some girls in the solitude of the Himālayas. But the Master said, "No, no, you must work in this very town. You have had enough of spiritual practices. Now this life of penance should be applied to the service of women. They are dreadfully suffering."

Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa intuited that Gaurī Mā longed to undergo a particular form of rigorous spiritual exercise, and suggested to her one day to finish it as early as possible. She accordingly left for Vṛindāvan and, in a secluded place near by, plunged into that course of exercise, which was to extend for nine months. But she could not anticipate that the great drama of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's life was drawing to a close. He wanted to see Gaurī Mā, but this could not be arranged. When she came to know of the Master's passing away and also of his eagerness to see her before his final exit, she felt mortified and was determined to end her life by austerity, but was dissuaded by a vision of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa. When, after the Master's passing, the Holy Mother went to Vṛindāvan she had Gaurī Mā searched out and met her in a lonely cave at Rāul, and when she left after a year's stay, Gaurī Mā continued in those parts and then went for a second time to the Himālayas. After thus spending about ten years in the north, she came back to Calcutta, where she fell ill twice. After recovery, she left on a pilgrimage to south India, and went as far as Rāmeshwar and Kanyākumārī. After visiting a few holy places in central India, she returned to Calcutta.

In the course of her travels she had a first-hand knowledge of the deplorable condition of Indian women. The words of the Master now began to ring more insistently in her ears. She came to realize that to better their lot she must remove illiteracy. She was thinking of a place for starting her work, when she was taken by a chance acquaintance of humble origin to Kapāleshwar, a sacred spot on the Ganges at Barrackpur, a few miles north of Calcutta. Here, in the year 1895, with what little money she could collect, she started the

Sāradeshwarī Āshrama, named after the Holy Mother. It was but the humble beginning of a great work—a nucleus for imparting both secular and spiritual training to helpless girls and women so as to develop them into worthy citizens. Getting up early in the morning, the inmates had their bath in the Ganges, performed spiritual exercises, studied and attended to the household duties. Gaurī Mā's presence and active participation in these, combined with her love, inspired them all and made them overlook their lack of physical comforts. It was also Gaurī Mā's intention to train up a band of renouncing women who would dedicate themselves to the task of women's uplift. She lived to see this desire of hers fulfilled by the *Mātṛi-saṅgha* she established.

Through her indefatigable energy, patience and self-sacrifice, she succeeded in enlisting the sympathy of many people in her comprehensive programme of education and, as a result, this small but useful Āshrama grew up to be an important centre of learning for Hindu girls and women. In 1911, it was removed to a rented house at Goābāgān, Calcutta, and after various shifts it was finally located in its permanent quarters at 26, Mahārānī Hemanta Kumārī Street, Shyāmbāzār, Calcutta, in 1924.

The last forty-odd years of her eventful career were devoted to the education of women in Bengal. She was in fact one of the pioneers in this field. No doubt, she had to fight a tough battle, almost single-handed, but she eventually got over the hurdles. For the upkeep of the institution, she had to beg from door to door. Indifferent to praise or blame, she stuck to her gun like a true soldier, and her heart always dwelt on God, whose living presence and benediction she felt under all circumstances. She visualized a great future for Bengal's womanhood, and initiated ideas which gradually caught the imagination of all sections of society.

But Gaurī Mā was not merely an educationist. She was a forceful speaker and a champion of the ancient Hindu ideals. Above all, she was a spiritual genius. Hundreds of aspirants for a higher life sought her guidance, and she gave them the treasures she had gathered during the long span of her life. Under a hard exterior, she possessed a motherly heart that felt for all. To save a puppy from the cruelties of some monkeys, she would even risk her life by climbing to the roof of a building by means of a dilapidated and slippery wall, with a stick tied to her back. She would jump into the Ganges to rescue a drowning girl, forgetting at the moment that she did not know how to swim. She stood boldly against injustice in any form and did her level best to help the oppressed. In this she knew no fear and faced baffling situations with cool self-confidence, and invariably she came out victorious.

Her life's work was now coming to a close. There was a growing deterioration in her health due to old age. In 1932, while visiting the temple of Jagannātha at Purī, she said addressing the deity, "Lord, this is probably my last visit." Two years later she went for a change to Baidyanāth, and the next year to Nabadwīp. Here she entertained the devotees not only with consecrated food but also with extremely funny stories as well as devotional songs and ecstatic talks on divine topics. In 1936 she celebrated the Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa Birth Centenary in Calcutta for five days. In December, 1937, she fell ill and suffered from cough and weakness. Despite this she had a great celebration arranged early in February next.

On the last day of that month, which was the auspicious Shivarātri day, she said, "Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa is pulling the thread," meaning thereby that her play was over. She talked long and earnestly to the women devotees. In the afternoon she asked them to deck her well, and was delighted to see it done. At midnight she instructed the chief inmate to celebrate the Master's coming birthday with due solemnity as in previous years. Towards the end of the night, she had the emblem of Dāmodara brought to her. When asked how she was finding Him, she said, "Beautiful. I see Him vividly with my eyes open or closed. I see Him all the time." She placed the emblem on her head and kept it long on her bosom. Shortly after, she tenderly handed over charge of the deity to the chief inmate. The next day she passed with unusual calmness and joy, and talked on the Divine Mother and Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. She uttered thrice, 'Guru Rāmakṛiṣhṇa,' and started to repeat the Lord's name. Her mind soon left the normal plane, and at 8-15 in the evening, on the 1st March, 1938, she finally passed into beatitude.

Though her mortal frame is no more, her hallowed memory is a living reality, and is cherished with profound love and respect by thousands for her heroic self-sacrifice, for the splendid contributions she has made to the advancement of womanhood in Bengal, and for her ministrations as a spiritual teacher of a high order to all suffering souls.

7. LAKṢHMĪMAṆI DEVĪ

The history of mankind records with pride the brilliant achievements of women who by their one-pointed efforts discovered the highest truths of spirituality and became a beneficent influence in human society. This was the case with Lakṣhmīmaṇi Devī, familiarly known as Lakṣhmī Didi. She was the daughter of Shrī Rāmeshwar Chaṭṭopādhyāy, second elder brother of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, and was born at Kāmārpukur on the 11th February, 1864. Rāmeshwar and his wife Shākambharī Devī were both simple and generous-minded people, who loved to take great care of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. Lakṣhmīmaṇi had an elder brother, Rāmlāl, and a younger brother, Shivarām, and all of them lived in after years at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, and also had the rare privilege of enjoying the love, and blessings of their saintly uncle.

Since her early age, Lakṣhmīmaṇi developed a deep respect for the gods and goddesses, especially for the household deities Shītalā and Raghuvīra. She was extremely reticent by nature and spoke only with her nearest relatives, which led many outsiders to think that she was dumb. But she was exceptionally intelligent and had a prodigious memory. Though her education did not go beyond the rudiments of the primary stage, she could read with ease the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and similar other books in Bengali. With her natural endowments she could understand the import of these sacred books. This helped her considerably in building up her spiritual life, which later became a source of great inspiration to all who came into close contact with her.

Lakṣhmīmaṇi's father, Rāmeshwar died prematurely in December, 1873, and the family had to pass through more straitened circumstances. According to his desire, she was married shortly after, at the age of twelve, to Dhan Kṛiṣhṇa Ghaṭak of the village of Goghāt, in the Hooghly district. A couple of months later, when her elder brother Rāmlāl went to Dakṣhiṇeshwar to consign the relics of his father to the Ganges, he informed Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa of Lakṣhmī's marriage. Immediately he fell into a trance saying, "She will soon be a widow." His nephew Hṛiday, who was sitting there, was shocked and said to him after he had regained normal consciousness, "Well, you love Lakṣhmī so much; how is it that you uttered those dreadful words instead of blessing her?" At his importunity, the Master said, "What could I do? It was the Divine Mother who made me say so." He added, "Lakṣhmī is a manifestation of Mother Shītalā—a very spirited goddess, while the person with whom she has been married is just an ordinary mortal. Lakṣhmī can never be the mate of such a being.... She cannot help being a widow!" True to his prophetic utterance, Lakṣhmī's husband, who had visited Kāmārpukur only for a day after the marriage, soon left his house in search of a job and never returned. When twelve years passed without a trace of him, her relatives, following the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures, sent Lakṣhmī from Kāmārpukur to her father-in-law's house to perform his funeral ceremony. In deference to Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's wish, she gave up all claims to her husband's property.

After her marriage, Lakṣhmīmaṇi spent only two or three years at Kāmārpukur and then began to live at the age of fourteen, with the Holy Mother at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. A new chapter of her life now opened for her. The sacred atmosphere of the place, combined with the soul-uplifting association of the holy couple, urged her to plunge into the depths of her soul to realize the Truth. The Master, who knew her heart, lovingly initiated her into the Vaiṣhṇava mode of practice. With no worldly ties to drag her behind, Lakṣhmī now embraced the covetable career which every earnest seeker pursues. For thirteen years, from 1872 to 1885, she lived mostly in the temple garden of Dakṣhiṇeshwar. She often described how she lived with the Holy Mother at the small music-tower and helped her to cook. Both had a very strenuous time in their prisonlike cell, which explains the Master's jocose reference to them as a pair of parrots living in their cage. But Lakṣhmī was exceedingly happy to live in that divine atmosphere, where she had the Holy Mother's dedicated life as a glorious object-lesson before her, and also could drink deep of the spiritual wisdom that flowed incessantly from the lips of the Master.

During the Master's fatal illness, Lakṣhmīmaṇi often was a companion of the Holy Mother at Shyāmpukur and the Cossipore garden and served him. During his lifetime, she did not go to any holy place, inasmuch as Dakṣhiṇeshwar supplied all her spiritual needs to the full. But after his passing away, she felt great yearning to go on a pilgrimage. She soon went to Vṛindāvan and spent a year there in the company of the Holy Mother in hard spiritual practices. She then accompanied the Mother to Purī. The Master had said to the Holy Mother, "Keep a little watch over Lakṣhmī. She will maintain herself, and not be a burden on any of you." After this the Mother had no fixed abode, and Lakṣhmī Didi (we shall henceforth call her by this familiar name) lived with her when this was practicable; at other times she lived at Kāmārpukur. Her eldest brother Rāmlāl, on the death of his wife in 1905, invited Lakṣhmī Didi to live with him at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, which she mostly did for nearly ten years.

While living here, she began to attract people by her personality, and some of these took initiation from her. Gradually a circle of devotees was built up round her. When they found that her brother's house was no longer suitable for her growing needs, they had a two-storeyed building constructed for her on a near-by plot of land, from the top of which she could have a view of the Ganges. Here she lived for nearly another ten years, mostly spending her time in spiritual practices and, during the intermissions, discoursing on religious topics to her devotees and visitors. She kept them spell-bound by her animated talks, particularly those relating to Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa or Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa and Rādhā. Indeed, to live with her even for a while was a spiritual bath, and to visit her house was a veritable pilgrimage.

Besides Vṛindāvan and Purī, where she had been several times, Lakṣhmī Didi visited from time to time many other important places of pilgrimage in northern India. This, coupled with her religious exercises, gave her, towards the latter part of her life, a remarkable catholicity of view. Once during a visit to Kenduli, the birth-place of the poet Jayadeva, in Bīrbhūm, out of devotion she did not hesitate to take food cooked by some Vaiṣhṇavas of humble origin. Her sympathy for Vaiṣhṇavas, too, was exemplary. When any of them approached her for help, she would at once give them something. She once gave away even her costly woollen wrap. Yet she could be firm as a rock when the occasion needed it. Once an influential person of Kāmārpukur wanted to sacrifice a goat before her family deity Shītalā. She remonstrated, saying it was against their custom, but to no avail. Thereupon she snatched the sword meant for immolating the animal, and chased the offender, who fled for his life. She then came back and shut the front door. That stopped all further attempt at animal sacrifice there.

Once during one of her visits to Vṛindāvan, her maidservant stole two hundred rupees from her box and ran away. She had only a few annas left. Finding no help from any quarter, she wrote to Kāmārpukur for money, and spent a few days on stale bread which she purchased at a cheap rate, till she was conducted home. Shortly after, the maidservant was on her death-bed and confessing her guilt, asked for Lakṣhmī Didi's forgiveness, saying it was impossible for her to refund the stolen money, since it was already spent. Lakṣhmī Didi forthwith forgave her.

In October, 1922, she went to Purī and selected a plot of land, which was secured from the Municipality. On it a house was constructed for her, which she occupied in February, 1924, with a view to spending her last days at Purī. She was now fairly advanced in years, and after some time her health began to break down off and on. At last, on the 24th February, 1926, at the age of sixty-two, she laid down her tired limbs at the lotus feet of the Lord for eternal rest.

Thus ended a life which was a continuous round of prayer, devotion and service. About her versatility, Sister Niveditā has given a very beautiful pen-picture in *The Master as I saw Him* (6th Ed., p. 150): "Amongst the ladies who lived more or less continuously in the household of Sārādā Devī at this time (November, 1898) were Gopāl's Mother, Jogīn-Mother, Rose-Mother, Sister Lucky, and a number of others. These were all widows,—the first and the last child-widows—and they had all been personal disciples of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa when he lived in the temple garden at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. Sister Lucky, or Lakṣhmīdidi, as is the Indian form of her name, was indeed a niece of his, and is still a comparatively young woman. She is widely sought after as a religious teacher and director, and is a most gifted and delightful companion. Sometimes she will repeat page after page of some sacred dialogue, out of one of the Yātrās, or religious operas, or again she will make the quiet room ring with gentle merriment, as she poses the different members of the party in groups for religious *tableaux*. Now it is Kālī, and again Saraswatī, another time it will be Jagaddhātrī, or yet again, perhaps, Kṛiṣhṇa under his Kadamba tree, that she will arrange, with picturesque effect and scant dramatic material."

She was as simple as a child. No worldliness could ever tarnish the snow-white purity of her character. There was no room for hatred in her scheme of life. She bountifully gave her love and wisdom to any one who sought for it. Though her mortal frame is gone, she will ever remain enthroned in the hearts of her countrymen as one of their most spiritually gifted women.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HOLY MOTHER

(SHRĪ SĀRADĀ DEVĪ)

The Background

Many of the great women of India from different arenas of life and different periods of history, introduced so far in the foregoing pages have, it may be noticed, one common element in their make-up, namely, spiritual strength. 'Spirit above matter' has been the watchword of this land all through the ages. Purity, humility, devotion, self-control, moral courage, selfless love—in fact, all that go to adorn spiritual life have always been valued here more than material possessions and sense-enjoyments. How to transcend human imperfections and bring out the Divine lying within the individual has been the central theme in the progressive unfoldment of Indian life.

Indeed, the pages of Indian history are illumined by the lives of saintly men and women radiating their brilliance from different spheres of action. And these pages cover millenniums. Even Buddha, the 'rebel child' of the Vedic faith, was six centuries ahead of Christ! As a matter of fact, the border line between history and myths can hardly be traced in the annals of this country. Before the search-light of modern scientific inquiry, Indian myths, legends and folk-lores are revealing nuggets of historical data pointing to a high order of civilization as early as the third millennium B.C. Thus India may be said to have been rearing, since the early dawn of human civilization, a splendid type of women as well as men with the characteristic impress of spiritual strength. It is worth observing that King Arthur has a number of prototypes in Indian legends, but that Guinivere has none. A spouse of a godman, legendary or historical, is invariably found here to be worthy of his spiritual pre-eminence. As models of faithful wives, Sītā and Sāvitrī of the mythical era are names to conjure with even in these days.

SHRĪ SĀRADĀ DEVĪ

The ideal of life, irrespective of sex, has had its roots deep in the national mind of the Hindus, since they sprang in the hoary past from the universal truths discovered and announced by the Vedic seers. The essential divinity of man and the fundamental unity beneath the infinite diversities of Nature are two such basic truths on which Indian civilization has been resting throughout the ages. Details in the superstructure have surely changed from age to age according to the varying social *milieu,* but the central ideas and ideals born of these universal truths have been living through scores of centuries.

Looking at Nature from one's stand on these basic truths, the varieties, related only to corporeal and ephemeral forms, are found to be on the surface of things. The substance within is always the same, namely, Brahman, the Absolute Reality. The soul of man is none other than Brahman. Thus sex, determined as it is by outward forms, is nothing but a passing appearance of the same sexless soul. Men and women are found to be distinct so far as their physical and mental patterns are concerned, but they are identical in spirit.

Now, the supreme achievement of human life, as seen from this standpoint of Hindu seers, consists in diving beneath the superficial varieties of Nature and realizing one's essential identity with the Divine Soul. For then and then only one reaches perfection, the ultimate goal of all exertions, through myriads of births and deaths. This, therefore, has been placed equally before men and women as the ideal of human life.

This ideal of discovering one's real self and thus manifesting the divinity lying within the individual has been glued to the national mind from the Vedic Age. All along, the Hindu society has been regulated with an eye to helping each individual on towards this spiritual objective.

For attaining this end, one has to purge the mind of all impurities, the offspring of crass selfishness. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' is really an immutable law of the spiritual realm. Renouncing the carnal demands of the senses and serving others as one's own self are admirable recipes for cleansing the mind, inasmuch as these lead to gradual self-effacement, the *sine qua non* of spiritual progress. This is why the Hindu society has been built up as a vast laboratory for purifying the heart through the edifying practice of renunciation and service.

The basic structure of this society consists of what is called *dharma,* or piety, which means graded courses of social duties prescribed for individuals belonging to different age-groups and holding different stations of life according to their temperamental variations. These duties, requiring varying degrees of self-sacrifice and love suited to different groups of individuals, have to be performed with religious devotion as one's *dharma.*

The highest rung of the ladder of renunciation is reached when, like Nachiketas, one finds all tempting things of the sense-world as nothing but hollow and fleeting delusions, or when one says, like Maitreyī, "What shall I do with anything that cannot lead me to immortality (that is, eternal bliss)?" At this stage, attachment to all worldly things fades away, and one feels the effulgence of the Divine Self. Purity at its highest is, therefore, represented by such all-renouncing seers filled with all-embracing, disinterested love. Many a blessed soul having such outstanding purity has burnt into the national mind the supreme worth of perfect self-denial as the last step towards the 'life whose head touches the stars.'

Religious celibacy has, therefore, been accepted by Hindu men and women as 'the towering ideal of the supersocial life.' Next to it, among women, ranks the sanctity of motherhood as the central ideal in the social life of this land. On the worldly plane, the mother's instinctive love and sacrifice qualify her spiritually to stand above all other human relationships. "Transcending the wife's, which may fluctuate with the sweetness bestowed upon it, the mother's affection, by its very nature, grows deeper with deep need, and follows the beloved even into hell. A yearning love that can never refuse us ; a benediction that for ever abides with us ; a presence from which we cannot grow away ; a heart in which we are always safe ; sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, holiness without a shadow—all these indeed, and more, is motherhood."[1] Thus portraying the Indian mother, Sister Niveditā, a highly erudite and devout Irish lady, exclaims, "For what thought is it that speaks supremely to India in the great word 'Mother'? Is it not the vision of a love that never seeks to possess, that is content simply to *be*—a giving that could not wish return: a radiance that we do not even dream of grasping, but in which we are content to bask, letting the eternal sunshine play around and through us?"[2]

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[1] Sister Niveditā, *The Web of Indian Life,* Indian Edition, p. 29.

This is why motherhood, representing a high order of renunciation and service, holds a glorified place in the scheme of Hindu life. It has been idealized and raised to the skies to span heaven and earth. God with His unfailing love is worshipped by many as the Divine Mother; while all women are to be looked upon by men as the earthly counterparts of the Divine Mother. Illumined in this way, the sanctity of motherhood has been before the Hindu society from time immemorial. In order to maintain their dignified position, women have been trained to develop their motherly qualities of love and sacrifice and to chasten these by extending the scope of their operation beyond the frontiers of the home. Thus developing and expressing, through their deportment, the benign attitude of the mother towards all has constituted their special line of spiritual growth. This explains how age and experience required by such development have come to be prized by them above youth and physical charm. Instead of reckoning these latter as their supreme asset, the women of this land have to enhance the beauty and sublimity of their character in order to be worthy of their honoured position in society.

The keystone of such character has been chastity, unflinching faithfulness through life to one man as the husband. A Hindu woman has to follow her husband like a shadow even unto death. From the strictly Hindu view-point no amount of provocation may justify annulling the marriage tie by either side. Divorce of the husband by a wife will be as shocking to her children as the falling of an idol from its pedestal. Remarriage of widows, except under special circumstances, is tabooed on the same ground. Thus the idea of chastity, connoting steadfastness and purity, has led to the absolute inviolability of marriage, which is the price the Hindu women have to pay for preserving the sanctity of motherhood.

Obviously these ideas and ideals are meant for gradually expanding and chastening the woman's heart so that she may rise above the sense-plane and proceed, as far as possible, towards the spiritual objective of manifesting the Divine that has been within her all the time.

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[2] *Ibid.* p. 31.

But it must be said that although the Hindu society has been hinged on such lofty ideas and ideals, it is not easy for the people to cling to these for any lengthy period of time at a stretch. Popular minds naturally gravitate towards the material plane. At times, the spiritual quest of life as the primary urge for substantial social progress is lost sight of. People then succumb to a spell of decadence. But this phase of the society is invariably followed by a period of resurgence ushered in by the advent of a spiritual superman. The history of this country is punctuated by such alternate ebb and flow in the stream of Hindu social life. This history is replete with instances of the appearance of towering spiritual personalities at psychological moments to wake up the social consciousness from its periodical torpor and initiate a period of dynamic progress on all fronts.

Such a phenomenon is passing before our eyes. After the darkest period of set-back, when the very foundation of the Hindu social structure was about to be blown off altogether by a rush of sceptical thoughts, India witnessed, towards the close of the last century, the beginning of a mighty spiritual revival. Regarding this renaissance, Swāmī Vivekānanda, hailed by Indians as their 'Patriot Saint' and by foreigners as the 'Cyclonic Monk of India,' proclaimed: "Before the effulgence of this new awakening, the glory of all past revivals . . . will pale like stars before the rising sun, and compared with this mighty manifestation of renewed strength, all the many past epochs of such restoration will be as child's play."

The inspirer of this resurgence was Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. He was "the reformed and remodelled manifestation of all the past epoch-makers in religion," as Swāmī Vivekānanda has put it. This gigantic spiritual personage was, as the late lamented French savant Romain Rolland stated in 1926, "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years his soul animates modern India. . . . He was a little village brahmin of Bengal, whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti . . . ."

Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's life (1836-86) reads almost like an 'ancient legend, belonging apparently to the realm of mythology.' It has gone to bridge the gulf between the credulous, hoary past and the critically alert, living present. Scientific reason pauses with awe before this life, and discerns through it the possible reality of such glorious lives narrated even in the legends of this land. In Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's heart one can almost feel the throbbing of Shrī Rāma and Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa!

As the latest representative of all the seers and prophets of the world, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa revived the visionary spirit of the ancient times in this age of scientific reason and severe critical inquiry. His resplendent life of epoch-making spiritual experiences, covering the entire range of realization regarding the fundamental verities of life and existence, floodlights the basic truths of the major religions on earth. This life stands like an open challenge to the validity of atheism and agnosticism as well as to that of the fanatic demands of the various shades of fundamentalists belonging to different religions. It came just in time to save humanity from the benumbing grip of untrammelled reason masquerading in the name of rationalism, the craze of the modern era, and also from the evils of sectarian and communal conflicts egged on by unenlightened, rut-bound faith. Indeed, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's life resembled a parliament of religions, demonstrating an essential harmony among the apparently discordant notes emitted by different sects and creeds.

In the wake of this glorious life a tidal wave of spirituality has started rolling in all directions. A mighty renaissance of all religions is in the offing. The Hindu society is being roused to discover its ancient moorings. The spiritual ideas and ideals at the helm of this society appear to have found a fresh lease of vigorous life.

The age-old spiritual ideal of Indian womanhood has begun to glow over again with a fresh lustre before it could be snuffed out by the blast of modern materialism. By worshipping and realizing the goddess Kālī, by accepting a highly gifted, devout woman as a spiritual guide, by offering ritualistic homage at the feet of his own wife, and by regarding all women, high or low, as the Divine Mother, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa raised this ideal to an unprecedented height of glory. To crown all, he left, for the world to visualize this splendid ideal, a perfect model in the person of his immaculate spiritual consort, Shrī Sāradā Devī, known to the devotees as the Holy Mother.

AN ENIGMA

The Holy Mother's life is an enigma. On the surface, it appears to be just the homely life of a Bengalee brahmin lady, mostly in a rural setting. Yet her deportment discloses unmistakable marks of dignity and love of an order that may easily be called superhuman. These seem to well out from a source within the immeasurable depth of her personality, reaching, perhaps, the very core of the universe.

Under the present hegemony of science, people tend to pin their faith only on sense-bound experience. They require something tangible, which can be weighed, analysed and assessed through material tests, before they can accept it. Anything superhuman or divine has no appeal to these votaries of what has been described by a modern thinker as 'sensate culture.' Yet spirit, discernible only through intuition, refuses to submit to such tests. Hence the Holy Mother's life, with rarely anything momentous about it on the material plane, may not impress such people.

It is worth noticing that even people of little faith had a chance of being impressed by having a view of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa in his frequent ecstatic moods and listening to the captivating outpourings of his heart. But the sublime beauty of the spiritual web of the Holy Mother's life was never exposed to the irreverent gaze of any sceptical observer. The veil covering her face was, perhaps, a symbol of the curtain drawn over the supernormal grandeur of her inner life.

Its brilliance, however, enthrals intuitive vision. Moreover, through her rapt humility, her touches of serene silence and the gracious and unbounded richness of her motherly affection, flashes of the heavenly splendour of her inner life strike reverent eyes. To them she appears to resemble the Blessed Virgin depicted by Christian art. Material features and incidents related to such a life may be described with precision. But these do not go far to bring out the luminous core within that life. How can the divine glow of the spirit dominating a hallowed life be expressed in terms of matter?

Besides, there are many things connected with the apparently simple and unostentatious life of the Holy Mother that baffle one's understanding, particularly in our days. Visions and incidents authoritatively reported carry us back to the era of myths, 'when gods and goddesses shared the bed and the board of mortal man.' But these undeniable facts of experience of a moderner cannot easily be brushed aside. These, rather, go to demonstrate the validity of many such supernatural elements, found in legendary lives, that are about to be relegated to the scrap-heap by the modern descendants of the ancient *ṛiṣhis* (seers). Vindicating the precious lore handed down by the Vedic seers, this hallowed life appears to have linked the scientific attitude of the modern world with the idealistic vision of the ancients.

Then, looking closely at even the superficial contents of the Holy Mother's life, one finds through these an amazing record of synthesis of a number of fundamental contradictions. Human life mirroring the Absolute in such a manner is undoubtedly a unique phenomenon. Perhaps one may see in her the highest manifestation of Divinity through a woman so far recorded in human history.

However, in and through her, the ideal of Indian women has soared far above the traditional height. In the galaxy of the greatest women of this land, the Holy Mother of our days shines apart in conspicuous luminosity. Perhaps such a life appeared at this critical moment in the history of India to illumine the way out of the present welter of cultural conflicts.

But was the Holy Mother 'the last of an old order, or the beginning of a new?' She might be a bridge between the two. Who knows? This aspect also presents her life as a puzzle.

From the above it will be evident that one can hardly expect to portray such an enigmatic life. A hazy sketch based on materials gleaned from authentic sources, however, is given below by way of completing this volume, which is being published on the occasion of her first Birth Centenary. It may be noted that no attempt has been made to prune and dress the materials for suiting sophisticated tastes. One may take the following outline of this epoch-making life for whatever it is worth.

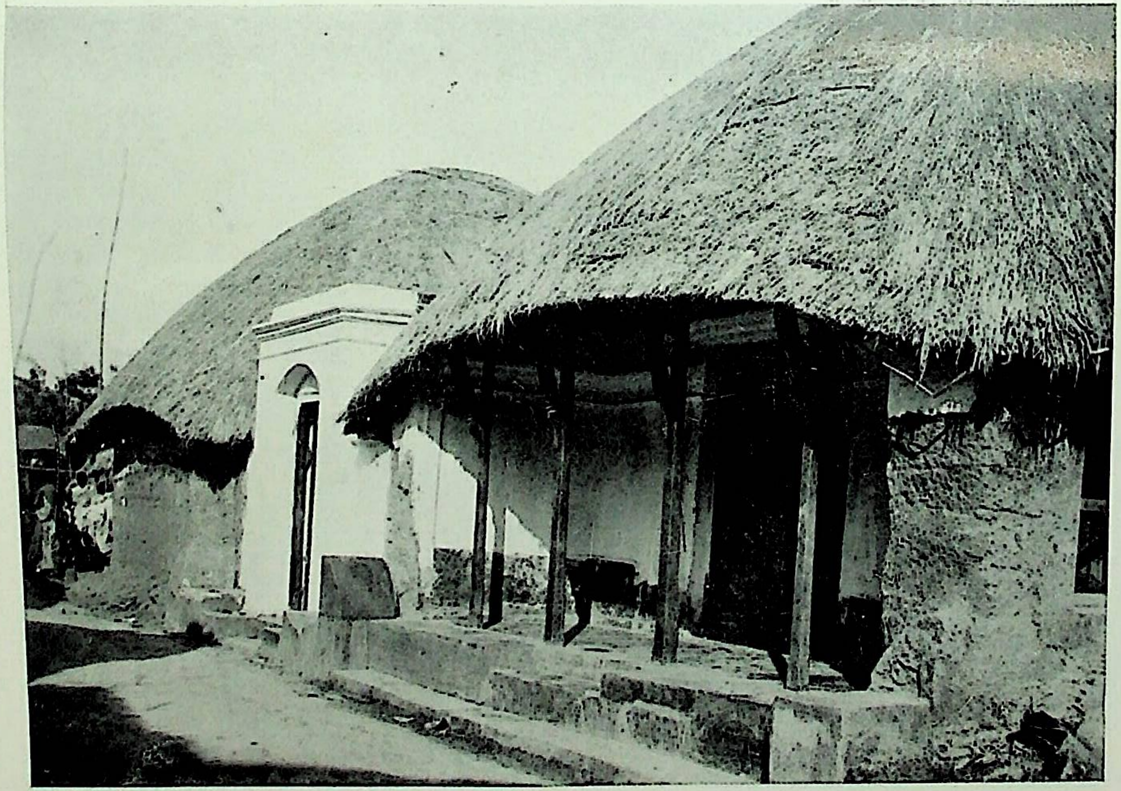
In the Rural Setting

The main setting of the Holy Mother's life bears a remarkable contrast to the fashionable seats of the present-day society. She was born in a tiny village of Bengal lapped in Nature's bounty, but devoid of modern amenities. Away from the reach of urban civilization, the simple folk of the malaria-ridden hamlet were content with the modest living eked out of their honest labour in the fields or in the archaic workshops. Barely a hundred thatched cottages enclosed by mud walls composed the village, a glaring antithesis of a modern city of sky-scrapers! Barring a few primitive artisans and a sprinkling of brahmins serving the community as priests, the bulk of the villagers were tillers of the soil.

At a safe distance from the irksome noise and desperate rush of the city, these rural people could enjoy the spiritual ease that Nature alone can afford. The rich mosaic of natural colours on all sides was not soiled by the soot and dust of industrial towns. The blue vault overhead with delightful variations of light in the course of the day, the green foliage all about with pleasing changes of shade marking the different parts of the year, the auburn grandeur of the corn fields on the eve of the harvesting season, all these blended together to reflect the divine beauty of Nature. The sight would easily soothe one's nerves and plunge the mind in peaceful contemplation.

As the people there, in their simplicity, had not yet learnt to question their faith in God and religion, prayer and devotional songs in the evening would relieve the monotony of the day's labour; religious and social festivities strewn all over the year would go to allay for a time even their occasional afflictions due to poverty, disease or mishaps. Moreover, people in distress would find in the fraternal sympathy of the neighbours a fund of solace. The ups and downs of a unit would contribute to the weal or woe of the entire population. Thus poles apart from a present township, where one scarcely has the chance or inclination of knowing the next-door neighbour, the little village community would live almost like one family. 'Heart within and God overhead,' it would go merrily along the path chalked out apparently by traditional religion and morality.

This is a rough picture of Jayrāmbāṭī, a hamlet on the south-eastern corner of the Bankura district of Bengal, as it existed towards the middle of the last century. At that time, there lived in that place a pious Brāhmaṇa couple, Rāmchandra Mukhopādhyay and Shyāmāsundarī Devī. They were not well off. Rāmchandra grubbed



THE HOLY MOTHER'S COTTAGE AT JAYRĀMBĀṬI

out a meagre living for a joint family with three brothers from the yield of a few acres of paddy land and the paltry earnings of a village priest. But there was contentment. As the wants of the family were limited, the small income would sometimes leave even a margin for meeting the humane demands of Rāmchandra's generous heart.

Of course, things were not always smooth. Sometimes Rāmchandra had to be worried for money. Once when he was in such a state, he had a mysterious vision presaging a turn of good luck after the birth of a divine being as his daughter. A little later, his virtuous wife also had a similar vision. As anticipated by both of them, Shyāmāsundarī gave birth to a daughter on the 22nd December, 1853. In the light of their presentiment the parents hugged the baby as a light from heaven, and their hearts were filled with celestial bliss.

Their dear and, in a way, esteemed first-born child drew from them not only their best affection but also some amount of regard springing from the foreknowledge obtained in their vision. Nursed by their particular care and petted by one of her uncles, Nīlmādhav, the little one grew up in the medieval setting of Jayrāmbāṭī till, in later life, she came to be known as the Holy Mother.

The little girl, Sāradā, as her parents called her, had something out of the ordinary in her mental make-up. Always very simple in her habits, she would invariably act as a peacemaker among her playmates, whenever they fell out. The common rustic games of her chums marked by childish pranks could not attract her. Rather dignified and self-composed even at that early age, she had a flair for edifying amusements. Her dolls' house contained little images of goddesses Kālī and Lakṣhmī, and she loved to worship them, evidently mimicking the elders. This was the kind of play that really amused her, and led her on congenial occasions to display wonderful feats of self-absorption. Sometimes even grown-ups would be dumbfounded to find the infant prodigy absorbed in a deep state of meditation!

Before she stepped out of her infancy, Sāradā had gone through the most significant event of her early life. Leaving over that momentous incident for the present, let us have a look at her general upbringing during the period. As early as Sāradā was physically fit, she was admitted into the usual course of home-training that was in vogue in rural areas at that time. She started assisting her mother in the kitchen and doing sundry odd jobs of the household: standing in neck-deep water, she would cut grass for the cows ; she would carry tiffin to the day-labourers in the paddy field ; she would go with her mother to pluck cotton from their modest plantation. Once she had to go about gleaning grains left over by the locusts that had ravaged the paddy crops of the season. On another occasion, when the locality was in the grip of a famine, and her father's stock of rice was liberally released to feed the hungry, Sāradā, a girl of twelve, would be found serving them with meals fresh from the oven, and cooling the hot stuff by gently fanning it with maternal solicitude.

But so far as literary education was concerned, Sāradā had very little of it. For a time, along with some of her younger brothers, she attended the village primary school, where, however, her lessons had to be cut short. For, at that time, even bare literacy of a girl of Jayrāmbāṭī had a bad odour about it. But Sāradā, in her persevering zeal, managed furtively to learn a bit of reading under chance guides at different periods of her life. Of the three R's, she picked up in this way some acquaintance only with the first. In her old age, she would be found reading the Hindu epics, but never, perhaps, to scribble even her own name.

The lack of proper literary education, however, went to serve as a foil to set off the lustre of her intuitive wisdom in later life. Moreover, her home environment had an educational value of its own. The holy atmosphere in the family under her devout parents, the lessons of self-denial and service through domestic duties, the ample scope of living in communion with Nature, the spiritual food catered for by fairly frequent religious festivals and recitals or dramatic performances of inspiring pieces out of Hindu mythology—all these combined to draw out the best in her. The real objective of education is surely the manifestation of the potential perfection in man. and towards this all these factors helped her on.

Indeed, the Hindu society in villages, in spite of its decadence at the time, did not lose its grip on the essential elements of character-building education. The system of home-training for girls, despite other shortcomings, had something substantial in it to rear them so as to live useful, disciplined and well-adjusted lives. And this fact has been confirmed by the illustration of the Holy Mother's life. She showed by her example how such a course of primitive training, devoid of the glittering flash of modern academic education, could lay the foundation of the soundest character humanity has ever witnessed in a woman.

THE MOMENTOUS EVENT

The momentous event of Sāradā's early life was her marriage. She was then barely six years old. A shocking piece of news to the modern world, particularly to its Western section! Yet such a marriage was perfectly in keeping with the orthodox social code of the Hindus. The reason behind the sanction of such an apparently outrageous custom is not far to seek.

Everything in Nature, even a social practice, has a bright side along with a dark one. The marriage of healthy adults may yield strong and virile children, undoubtedly a valuable asset of a nation; but how far it may contribute to domestic bliss is a questionable proposition. The Hindus, believing in the utility of a joint family as a training ground for the expansion of the heart, chose the other way of securing domestic bliss even at the risk of losing the physical vitality of the nation. Of course, by way of a safeguard against its probable evil effects, the Hindu social laws enjoin that early marriage is not to be consummated before both the parties attain puberty. So long as this injunction is religiously observed, hardly any objection may be raised against this custom on physical grounds. Now, after marriage a Hindu bride becomes a member of another family, where to keep up harmony she has practically to recast herself in a new set of relations and family traditions. The earlier this is done, the easier becomes the task psychologically. Hence early marriage rather conforms to the requirements of a life of self-denial and service prescribed for a Hindu woman, though it may repel hard-boiled individualists of our days.

Particularly in the present case, there is no reason for any one to be shocked, for, through it, humanity has been presented with a fresh gospel of conjugal union. No word has yet been coined in any language of the world to define the kind of union into which Sāradā entered at the age of six. Marriage and its synonyms in different languages invariably connote some kind of authorized sex relation between a man and a woman with an eye to procreation. But absolutely devoid of anything sensual about it, this union of two immaculate souls in unfathomable love should have some other name. Perhaps, 'Platonic love' is the nearest idea that has been realized through this unique fact of the nineteenth century.

However, finding no other suitable name, we have perforce to use the common parlance for designating this holy union as marriage. Yet we have to remember the fact that it was a novel kind of wedlock in which both the partners were to observe lifelong celibacy. It was a sacred union of two kindred souls. Reminding one of how Pārvatī of the Hindu legends was married to the self-denying and self-forgetful god of wisdom, Mahādeva, Sāradā was wedded to a mad man of God, Gadādhar Chaṭṭopādhyāy, later known as Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa.

After the first three years of his frenzied, unguided, yet successful quest of the goddess Kālī in the temple garden of Dakṣhiṇeshwar near Calcutta, Gadādhar's health was practically shattered by the inordinate strain. Physicians having failed to cure him, he was sent over to his village home, Kāmārpukur, to see if that change of environment might bring him round. Here, though his physical ailments abated in some degree, his God-intoxicated mind would always remain abnormally pitched above the plane of worldly affairs. To bring it down to the level of earthly life, his worried mother posed the idea of getting him to marry. Gadādhar, far from resenting it, readily agreed to the proposal; and when he found that his elder brother Rāmeshwar was getting tired of his fruitless search for a suitable bride, Gadādhar went so far as to direct his brother's steps to the house of Rāmchandra Mukhopādhyāy at Jayrāmbāṭī, about four miles away to the north-west, so that he might come to the end of his quest. Heaven only knows how Gadādhar came to know that Rāmchandra Mukhopādhyāy's daughter little Sāradā had been lying ear-marked as his bride. Mysterious are the ways of mystics, whose penetrating vision can read, beneath the crust of Nature, the pointers of the Divine Will!

Had little Sāradā also any mysterious inkling about her future partner of life? Who knows? There is a story, however, that some years back, in a party at the neighbouring village Sihor, when infant Sāradā on her mother's lap was asked sportively as to whom she would like to have as her husband, she pointed her finger at once at Gadādhar, who was present there on that occasion. If this report be a true one, the choice of the baby-prodigy, instead of being explained away as merely a chance coincidence, may be attributed to something deeper, perhaps to the Inscrutable Power pulling the wires from behind.

However, the nuptial ceremony sanctified by the usual religious rites was gone through at Jayrāmbāṭī in May, 1859. The little girl might not have realized at the moment what this lift of her social status meant. Nor, perhaps, did she realize at that time what was to come up in the train of this auspicious event for unfolding the majesty of her inner life. As the curtain was rung down after this momentous act of her life-drama, she slipped back to her normal course of life under her parents at Jayrāmbāṭī, as recounted in the last section.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

The sequel of Sāradā Devī's marriage is replete with scenes and incidents remote from ordinary life. The pathos of anxious expectation and worrying misgivings relieved by happy and dramatic turns of events, the hazards of dangerous hurdles in the way eased by peaceful solutions and safe endings—all these chequered the path on which she advanced firmly and steadily towards Peace and Blessedness. Really, the tale of her eventful journey on the track opened by her marriage reads almost like a romance!

We have seen how Sāradā glided into her girlhood days in her paternal home immediately after the ceremony had been over. This continued till she was fourteen, except for the brief interlude of a few days, in the company of her husband, at Kāmārpukur in December, 1860. As she completed her seventh year, Gadādhar was required by a local custom to meet his child wife, bring her to Kāmārpukur in his company and send her back after a short stay. On this occasion, when he went to his father-in-law's house at Jayrāmbāṭī, the precocious little girl surprised everybody there by hurrying of her own accord to wash his feet and fan him. Thus Sāradā was led, probably, by some mysterious urge within herself to begin that service to her hallowed husband which was to absorb all the attention of her mature age!

After a long and trying gap of about seven years, they met again. Sāradā Devī was then fairly grown up so as to be aware of the import of her nuptial tie. She was brought from her father's house to meet her husband, who had just arrived at Kāmārpukur after a protracted absence. But what a change had come upon him! He appeared in a novel and puzzling role! No longer to be known as Gadādhar Chaṭṭopādhyāy, he was then a full-blown *sannyāsin* under another name!

On his return to Dakṣhiṇeshwar from his village home late in 1860, Gadādhar had forgotten everything about the world and its affairs and plunged headlong into severe courses of spiritual practice under different preceptors who had chanced upon him. In this way, seven long years went by to appease his insatiable hunger for Truth! During this period, he had raced through the entire range of spiritual realizations, culminating in the goal of merging the self in the One Reality beneath the passing panorama of Nature. Renouncing his family name and all earthly ties, he had taken the vow of a Hindu monk and come to be known as Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa Paramahaṁsa. By 1866, he was firmly established in a complete mastery of the spiritual realm. Divinity was fully manifest in him. He saw nothing but God within and around him. God as the unmanifested Absolute and as the Lord manifested through His creation were the two limits between which his consciousness would ply. Indeed, by the imperious command of his Divine Mother he was then resting on the threshold of relative consciousness for love of humanity, to serve it as its unfailing guide on the blessed path of spiritual evolution.

During this period, however, various distorted news about Gadādhar's transformation had percolated to his native village and its neighbourhood. Rumours, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, spread from house to house even in the small and out-of-the-way village Jayrāmbāṭī. A few of these placed him as a seer in communion with God, but the bulk pinned him down as a maniac. The loose and irreverent talks of the neighbouring women would sometimes reach Sāradā Devī's ears too. "Here comes Shyāmā's daughter, who has been married to a lunatic"—words like these would certainly sting her to the quick.

And later on, these talks preyed upon her adolescent mind. She faintly remembered her husband as a vision of her childhood.

Was he really a mad man, as they said? She was not sure, though she could not bring herself to believe it. Then, if he was a *sannyāsin,* how could he accept her as his wife? All these thoughts distressed her. Thus she was on tenter-hooks when she proceeded to Kāmārpukur to meet her husband in June, 1867.

The meeting, however, eased her flurried mind. All her doubts were laid to rest. The paradox of a *sannyāsin* behaving like her husband resolved into quite a natural thing! The right chord of her heart was touched by Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's overflowing spiritual love. With great devotion to him as her supreme guide, she would learn from his enchanting talks the divine purpose of life and the path one was to tread in order to achieve that end. She would, moreover, carefully treasure his instructions on the way of dealing skilfully with things and people on the secular plane.

Gradually, her spirit caught fire from the contact of her saintly husband. In and through him, she felt a divine presence radiating purity and peace. She felt that her heart was filled to the brim with bliss. And such a feeling came to stay even after Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa went back to Dakṣhiṇeshwar and she to Jayrāmbāṭī at the end of the year.

This feeling of constant peace within her mind proved to be her sheet-anchor when she had to spend year after year at Jayrāmbāṭī without getting any news from her husband. Worldly women of the neighbourhood would trade on the situation as before by dealing out all kinds of fabricated tales questioning the sanity of her dearest and most respected one on earth. Did they not remind one of Jaṭilā and Kuṭilā of the Hindu legends, pinching Shrī Rādhā by their glib and crafty tongues? However, armoured by the sweet remembrance of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's delightful and inspiring conduct on the last occasion, her tranquil mind was no more to be swayed by idle village gossip. She was not in a mood to listen to the wild and boring speculations of her neighbours about her husband, and that was why she would hardly stir out of her house to meet any of them during this period.

But the pang of separation from her beloved became keener as she advanced in age. Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, shut up in his mystic shell, seemed to be as remote from her as Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa at Dwārakā was to the queen of devotees, Shrī Rādhā, pining for union with her apparently indifferent sweetheart! She patiently spent a little more than four years of her adolescent life waiting for a call from her affectionate husband. Nothing came from that quarter. It became unbearable even to her poised and patient mind. She could not brook any further delay and craved intensely to be by his side and dedicate herself to his service. She thought of encountering him within his sanctuary at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. Was any secret pull from the other end shaping such a resolve in her mind? Who can tell?

In March, 1872, however, an opportunity turned up for her to fulfil her earnest longing. Some of her neighbours would be going to Calcutta for a dip in the Ganges on a sacred day. She chose to accompany them. Her father read her mind and gladly agreed to escort her in the proposed pilgrimage. The party started at the scheduled hour, intending to cover the journey of nearly sixty miles on foot, since there was no cheap conveyance at that time. After two or three days of tiresome walk to which Sāradā Devī was not used, she had an attack of malarial fever. Allowing the rest of the company to go on, Rāmchandra took his ailing daughter to a wayside inn for necessary rest.

That unwelcome ague on the way was about to frustrate her plan for contacting her beloved. This thought oppressed her more than her physical afflictions. But she had not to wait long when her dejected mind along with her drooping body was toned up by a mysterious vision.

Lying on her bed in the rest-house at night, she saw a very dark but amazingly graceful woman sitting by her and sympathetically stroking her aching head and limbs with her wonderfully cool and soft palm. Surprised to find that the burning sensation and anguish all over her body were subsiding under the benign touch of that unknown woman, Sāradā Devī became curious to know her whereabouts. She asked the kind stranger, "Where have you come from?" Quick came the reply, "From Dakṣhiṇeshwar." The name of the place stirred Sāradā Devī to her depths and she said plaintively, "I was on my way to that very place to meet my husband, but this fever is going to hold me up." Immediately she was solaced by the compassionate words of the visitor: "Surely you will get well and meet your husband, who has been in my safe custody for your sake."

Sāradā Devī was astounded by this unexpected, thrilling news. She wondered how the charming, strange woman could have such deep concern for her well-being. In her utter bewilderment Sāradā Devī questioned her saying, "But how are you related to me?" In a perfectly familiar tone came the bracing reply, "I am your sister," which soothed her nerves and lulled her to sleep.

Did Kālī, the presiding deity of the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple, come to relieve Sāradā Devī of her worries? The look as well as the words of the woman seen in the vision point unmistakably to that. It may be mentioned that Sāradā Devī had come across such psychic phenomena even in her early life. While, in her childhood, she would be cutting grass for cows in a tank, it is reported that she would find another unknown girl like herself helping her in her job! Similarly, in the prime of her youth at Kāmārpukur, while she would hesitatingly proceed alone to a neighbouring tank for bath, she would find a strange bevy of eight girls of her age coming from nowhere and serving as her escort! These seeming miracles may after all be quite normal facts of sober experience of a pure mind. To probe the authenticity of such readings, one has to rise to the observation-tower of intuition.

However, early next morning when Sāradā Devī left the bed, she was found hale and hearty, to the great relief of her worried father. Instead of waiting any longer, straightway they took up the last lap of their journey. After plodding along a short distance they found a palanquin, which was hired to carry Sāradā Devī, who was not then quite fit for standing the strain of a long walk. Thus, at the end of the day, at nine o'clock in the evening, Rāmchandra and his daughter reached their destination.

With a trembling mind Sāradā Devī entered the precincts of the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple. During the last four years her husband had not taken any notice of her existence. Did he still remember her as his beloved wife? Was there any soft corner for her in his God-intoxicated heart? Or had the intense affection showered upon her during his last sojourn at Kāmārpukur dried up meanwhile? But the vision she had seen on her way gave her some hope. It was a silver lining to her gloomy thoughts. Thus swayed between despair and faint hope, she approached, with a good deal of trepidation, her dearest and most esteemed one.

But all her misgivings vanished like mist before the warmth of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's cordial greetings. The great wizard of Dakṣhiṇeshwar, whose aloofness had been troubling her so long, suddenly became all love and compassion as soon as he sighted her. He became anxious to check whether the particular hour of her first arrival at the temple garden was an auspicious one. Then, when he met her, instead of regretting his own unconcern, he bewailed her delay in coming over. "Oh, you come after such a lapse of time! Now that Mathur Bābu (the last custodian of the temple) is no more, who will provide for your comfort with so much devotion?"—these winged words of her dearest naturally melted Sāradā Devī's heart. Who can plumb the depth of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's feelings and explain the mysterious game of hide and seek in which he had been indulging with his wife? Was it for stirring up the great hunger of her soul for spiritual union with him?

However, observing Sāradā Devī to be in the grip of malarial fever, which had relapsed on the last day of her journey, he became very anxious. He made her stay in his own room on a separate bed, with a female attendant, and promptly placed her under medical treatment. He also personally looked after every detail of nursing. She recovered in about four days and moved to the music-tower to live with her mother-in-law, who had been there for a long while.

One of these days of her first stay at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa asked his nineteen-year old wife whether she had come there to drag him down to the worldly plane. "No," came her prompt and dignified reply, "why should I pull you down? I am here to serve you so that you may go ahead on your chosen path." What a clear, bold and reassuring answer from a wife meeting her husband practically for the first time in the full bloom of her youth! And her assurance was not a fit. She meant seriously what she had said, for she stuck to it till the last day of her saintly husband's life. "Had she been of a different nature," Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa admitted later on to his devotees, "and come upon me like an avalanche of passion, I don't know how far I would have drifted." Indeed, her crystal clear mind, like that of her husband, was pitched far above the sordid cravings of the senses. Her innate saintliness fitted in completely with that of her husband, and made it possible for the world to witness a marvellous pattern of conjugal life. The match of these two kindred souls, the heavenly union of this supernormal couple, shines like a pole-star for adjusting the bearings of present-day civilization.

Towards the Life Divine

Having come in March, 1872, Sāradā Devī spent a little more than a year and a half at Dakṣhiṇeshwar in the inspiring company of her husband. And for nearly eight months of this period, she shared the bed of her saintly consort. What a revelation would these nights bring to her! From a close quarter, on the same bed, she would observe how Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, scarcely aware of his physical surroundings, would remain absorbed in divine communion. His absolutely stainless mind would ceaselessly rove in the spiritual realm through visions and ecstasies, losing itself at times in *samādhi* (ecstatic trance). It would never be affected by the faintest touch of carnality ; and all the time poised in heavenly thoughts, it would radiate peace and purity. Thus would Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa pass entire nights during the period, giving Sāradā Devī, his first and foremost disciple, ample scope for discerning from a close range the beatitude of an intensely spiritual life, of feeling almost the breath of Divinity.

At the beginning, however, Sāradā Devī would be awe-struck by the strange behaviour of her saintly husband. Particularly, when she discovered for the first time how he suddenly lost all signs of life and remained like a corpse, she was utterly dismayed. Uninitiated in the mysteries of trance, she was delightfully surprised to find him coming to life as soon as, following her panicky report, his nephew Hṛiday came there and uttered certain mystic formulae (*mantra*) in his ears. Later on, as Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa taught her to recognize different kinds of superconscious state and utter different mystic formulae suited to each for bringing him down to the normal plane, she became gradually used to this strange phenomenon. But she never knew when he would plunge into *samādhi* and she would have to utter the required *mantra*. That was why she made it a point to keep a constant watch over the changing moods of the saint by her side. Thus she had to keep vigil, night after night, through a period of eight months. After that, on Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's direction, Sāradā Devī shifted her bed to the music-tower.

During the above period, however, both the partners tested their power of self-control and were convinced of its superhuman range. Perhaps, self-control is not the proper word for describing the phenomenon. Far from being a case of suppression of sensual demands, it clearly demonstrated what sublimation really stands for. Indeed, hankerings of the flesh have no place where the beatitude of divine communion reigns. Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's mind was, therefore, immune to sensual appetite. And by her first-hand observation of the ecstatic bliss of the saint, Sāradā Devī's immaculate mind very naturally tuned itself to an exalted pitch, far above the jarring clamour of the senses, and she was inspired to scale the enchanting heights herself and capture the peak of spiritual bliss. Regarding the mode of ascent, she got her essential lessons from Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, the Master. At the end of this eight months' spiritual training, she had no other desire but to get a firm and unshakable stand on the beatific plane, while devoting herself to the service of her heavenly guide.

In this way, the relation of religious preceptor and disciple crystallized during this period and came to be admirably superimposed on the marital one. The husband, a confirmed monk, became the Master, while the wife came to be a disciple and, practically, a nun vowed to lifelong celibacy. Yet this was not all. Something more perplexing has to be reckoned before one may ascertain how they came to regard each other. Once while stroking his feet, Sāradā Devī inquired how Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa looked upon her. Promptly came the amazing reply, "The Divine Mother who is worshipped in the temple is verily the mother who has given birth to this body and who is now putting up in the music-tower, and again it is She who is stroking my feet at the present moment; verily I look upon you as a representation of the Blissful Mother in human flesh." Thus to the discerning eyes of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, Sāradā Devī's spotless mind, like a precious jewel, would reflect through its various facets the different aspects of the wife, the nun, the disciple and the Divine Mother, each in its perfection. What a marvellous synthesis of diametrical opposites!

One may very well look at the other side of the shield. Once Hṛiday, the son of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's elder sister, had a dig at Sāradā Devī by his waggish suggestion that she should address his maternal uncle as father. At this she solemnly replied, "What are you talking about? Why, he is my father, mother, friend, relative, my all-in-all in life." And it is a fact that till the last day of her life she regarded and worshipped Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa as the Divine Mother. So, from her view-point, he appeared in the composite relation of a husband, a monk, a spiritual guide as well as the Divine Mother.

Thus the holy couple had for each other a hearty affection, purged of all impurities and mingled with deep reverence. The most surprising thing, however, is that each perceived the other as the Divine Mother. Their mutual appreciation of divinity was deep-rooted, inasmuch as it was based on intuitive insight. Instead of being hollow words, it rested on something more reliable and constant than the findings of our sense-bound intellect. For intuition has so recently been verified by the latest 'sovereign mystic,' Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, as a worthier gate of knowledge to supra-mundane facts lying beyond the reach of our senses. Standing firmly on the rock of conviction born of his unerring mystic vision, Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa proceeded to make a solemn avowal of the fact that he perceived the Goddess under the veil of his wife.

On one auspicious new-moon night during her first stay at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa made Sāradā Devī sit before him on a special seat in his own room and worshipped her as the Divine Mother, observing meticulously the rituals prescribed by the Tantras for Ṣhoḍashī-*pūjā* (worship). As soon as the ceremony started, Sāradā Devī's consciousness was whisked off from the physical plane, and by the time it was completed, both she and Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa fell into a beatific trance. Thus transcending the sense-world the supernormal couple probably shed the last vestige of duality consisting in their distinctive forms, and merged in their original Self! After a long time, late in the third part of the night, the divine play on earth was resumed! Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa became faintly conscious of his distinct role of a devotee worshipping the Divine Mother in flesh and blood seated before him. He then surrendered himself to her along with the merits earned by his religious practices through life, and laid down at her feet the sacred accessory of formal worship, namely, his rosary for counting prayers. He concluded the ceremony by prostrating himself before her and uttering the prescribed salutation.

Thus Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's long and varied course of religious rites culminated in the worship of Divinity in the Holy Mother. It was the glorious finale of his epoch-making spiritual researches through nearly two decades. On the other hand, one should ponder how it was possible for Sāradā Devī to stand the tremendous shock of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's dynamic worship that had been capable of galvanizing even the stone image of Kālī, the presiding deity of the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple. Does it not look like a play of the Divine Mother posing as both the worshipper and the worshipped? The same Blissful Mother, the Cosmic Power, seems to have appeared on the human stage in two distinct forms, and enacted the inspiring roles of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa and Sāradā Devī. What else may fit in the episode and go to solve the riddle?

However, we need not rack our brains by casting about for the rationale of this event. It will be enough for us to note, first of all, that it has absolutely no parallel in the history of mankind. Nobody has ever heard of a religious teacher offering ceremonial homage to his pupil. None has even dreamt of a husband glorifying his wife by actual ritualistic performance. No, such a thing cannot be traced even in the lives of all previous Incarnations that the world has seen. Yet it happened almost before our eyes. The second point to be noted is that it looks like the opening of a new chapter of spiritual education by pointing to an unprecedented target of self-control. The bearing of this event on our lives is something we should pause to think about. Perhaps it was meant to burn deep in our hearts the supreme need of subordinating sex-consciousness to the higher demands of Self-knowledge for ensuring the spiritual evolution of mankind. Undoubtedly, by this unique observance in the early seventies of the nineteenth century the Indian ideal of the motherhood of women was raised to the highest pinnacle.

Some Revealing Sidelights

After the spiritual fire-bath during her first stay at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, Sāradā Devī returned to Kāmārpukur sometime in October, 1873. Shortly after that, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's second brother, Rāmeshwar, breathed his last, and in March next she lost her beloved father, Rāmchandra. After these bereavements, in April, 1874, she came back to Dakṣhiṇeshwar and stayed there for nearly a year and a half. This time she was lodged for a period a little more comfortably in a modest cottage set up in an adjacent plot by Shambhu Charaṇ Mullick, one of the Master's admirers. A maidservant was engaged for helping her in her chores as also for serving as her sole companion.

Within about a year she was laid up by a serious attack of dysentery. Through proper medical treatment arranged by Shambhu Bābu, she gradually picked up a little, and in September went to Jayrāmbāṭī for a climatic change. But there her life was jeopardized by a virulent relapse of the disease. Ordinary remedies having failed to cure her, she sought divine grace by prostrating herself before the village goddess, Siṁhavāhinī, with a vow of fast and vigil. She had not to wait long when the goddess instructed her to retire and apply a simple recipe that would relieve her of all ailments. Following this supra-physical advice, she quickly recovered. With the spread of this news of her miraculous cure, the rarely frequented shrine of the village goddess began to attract numerous suppliants from far and near ; and this has been going on up to this day. Siṁhavāhinī of Jayrāmbāṭī is no longer an inert image ; she has burst upon the view of local people as a sentient and gracious deity responding to the earnest prayers of the afflicted.

Within about six months of her sojourn at Jayrāmbāṭī, towards the end of February, 1876, her mother-in-law, Chandrā Devī, passed away peacefully in the presence of her saintly son at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. That year also, Sāradā Devī had severe physical troubles due to an enlargement of the spleen, which, however, yielded to the unorthodox treatment of a village quack. Recovering her health completely, in January of the following year she went to Dakṣhiṇeshwar for the third time.

Arriving there, she started living in the separate cottage put up for her on the last occasion. Soon, however, she had to leave it and move to the music-tower for the convenience of attending on Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, who had then a serious attack of dysentery. On this occasion, an unknown aged lady, introducing herself as a resident of Banāras, appeared on the scene and applied herself to nursing the sick Master. It was on her advice that Sāradā Devī shifted her lodging ; and never again did she return to the cottage.

Her fourth visit to Dakṣhiṇeshwar, in February, 1881, was not a happy one. This time she came with her mother and some other relatives, but they had to go back that very day, offended by Hṛiday's rude and high-handed behaviour. Shrī Rāmakrishṇa looked on like a child, watching, perhaps, the play of the Divine Mother pulling the wires from behind. It so happened that within about six months of this incident, Hṛiday, for some serious mistake on his part, had to quit the temple grounds for ever by order of the authorities. After the exit of his attendant Hṛiday, Shrī Rāmakrishṇa had no one to look after his personal needs, as required by his delicate health and self-absorbed mind. Moved by messages describing this state of things, and getting earnest calls from the Master to join him for his service, Sāradā Devī came back from Jayrāmbāṭī in February, 1882.

This time also she spent nearly a year and a half at Dakshiṇeshwar. Then, after an interval of about six months at Jayrāmbāṭī, she came back in January, 1884. But this was a short sojourn, since she had to return to Kāmārpukur for attending the marriage ceremony of a relative. In January, 1885, she joined Shrī Rāmakrishṇa for the last time and stayed with him till the end of his life in August, 1886. Thus from 1872 to 1886, a period of nearly fourteen years, she had a series of intermittent sojourns by the side of the Master, as she journeyed several times between Dakshiṇeshwar and Jayrāmbāṭī.

One sublime episode at her paternal home is worth recording. After the death of her father, the only prop of the family, her mother was hard put to it to maintain the family. Yet, by her resolute and resourceful stand together with the co-operation of her daughter, Sāradā Devī, she got over the embarrassing state within a few years. The turn of fortune of the struggling family is said to have followed the inauguration of the annual celebration of Jagaddhātrī-*pūjā*. And there is an interesting history behind this auspicious event.

Once Shyāmāsundarī Devī was very much shocked to see that the rice set apart by her for the village Kālī-*pūjā* had been refused. She wept bitterly at night, remorsefully thinking how the rice vowed to the Divine Mother Kālī could be utilized. That very night she had a vision and found to her satisfaction a way out of the impasse. A goddess with a crimson face, attended by two others, appeared before her in a dream and said, "Don't you worry. Offer me the rice stored by you for goddess Kālī; the day of my worship comes off a few days after hers." Recognizing her from this hint, Shyāmāsundarī was filled with delight and performed the worship of the goddess Jagaddhātrī that year for the first time. She was so much pleased that the following year also she wanted to repeat it. She told Sāradā Devī of her resolve and asked her to contribute some money. But the latter objected saying, "Why? You had the satisfaction of performing the ceremony once. Why should you bother to find the means for arranging it a second time?" At night, however, she herself had a dream in which the same three figures of her mother's vision appeared, and one of them said, "Well then, should we depart?" Sāradā Devī inquired as to who they were and was told that she was the goddess Jagaddhātrī attended by her companions, Jayā and Vijayā. At once she said, "No Mother, where would you go? No, no, I have not asked you to go away. Kindly stay here." Since that vision, the worship of Jagaddhātrī has been going on in that family as an annual function. Every year Sāradā Devī would attend it and help her mother, particularly, by scouring utensils as one of her usual duties. It may be mentioned here that later on Swāmī Yogānanda, a disciple of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa presented a set of wooden vessels for saving her labour, and that still later some paddy fields were purchased for meeting the recurring expenses of the worship.

It was in connection with one of her journeys to Dakṣhiṇeshwar during this period that one comes across a thrilling incident.

Sāradā Devī along with a group of relatives and neighbours set out on foot one day for Dakṣhiṇeshwar. On the way, a little before sunset, she was tired and could not keep pace with the rest of the party. There lay in front a vast tract of waste land, notoriously associated with terrifying tales of brigandage. Ruffians of a low caste (Bāgdi) living close by plied this nefarious trade, supposedly with the blessings of Kālī, whom they worshipped in the neighbourhood. The party was to cross this dangerous region before nightfall, lest they should be victimized by the brigands. Sāradā Devī, realizing the risk of the entire company due to her slow movement, asked others not to wait for her but to finish their journey across the perilous plain before it was dark. Thus, for the security of the rest of the party, she did not care to count the danger that might come upon herself. Taking her life in her hand, she solicited to be left alone. The companions, out of fear, obliged her by leaving her behind and advancing as fast as they could. She followed with slower steps.

When she had covered a short distance on the dreaded wild, darkness began to close in; and she was alone, the party having gone completely out of sight. All on a sudden she noticed, at a distance, a jet-black, burly fellow with a club on his shoulder heading quickly towards her and being followed by another hazy figure. Instantly Sāradā Devī took in the dangerous situation. Seeing there was no way of escape, she nerved herself to meet the crisis and stood still awaiting the arrival of the brigands.

The desperado came close to her and bellowed out in a harsh voice: "What are you doing here at this hour?" Coolly and appealingly Sāradā Devī answered, "Father, my companions left me behind, and possibly I have lost the way. Will you kindly conduct me so that I may join them? Your son-in-law dwells in the Kālī temple at Dakṣhiṇeshwar, and I am bound for that place to meet him. If you escort me as far as that, he will gratefully entertain you." At that moment, as the other person neared her, she was relieved to find that it was a woman, and she guessed correctly that it was the ruffian's wife. At once Sāradā Devī took her by the hand and said in an affectionate voice, "Mother, I am your daughter Sāradā. Cut off from my party, all alone and benighted in this horrid expanse, I found myself in a terrible plight. Luckily, you and father have turned up; else I don't know what I should have done for my safety."

Sāradā Devī's naive and endearing stand, unflinching trust and sweet words melted the brigands' stony hearts. Forgetting all about their low caste, they began to treat her as their own daughter. They made her break the journey for the night in an adjacent village so that she might rest her exhausted limbs. An improvised bed was made for her by the woman in a small shop, and the man bought some puffed rice for her night meal. Just like parents, they kept loving watch over her and in the morning they conducted her as far as the next halting place, where she was to join her party. Here the woman said to her husband, "My daughter had no substantial meal last night. Fetch some fish and vegetables from the bazaar. She must have better food today." As the man was off for marketing, her companions came to that place looking for her. She gratefully eulogized to them her Bāgdi parents, who had come to her rescue from a precarious situation.

While narrating this incident in later life to devotees, Sāradā Devī said, "A single night had bound us together by such a close tie of kinship, as it were, that I could not help weeping profusely when we parted. I made them promise to come to see me at Dakṣhiṇeshwar at their convenience. On that day they followed us for some time. The woman picked some green peas from the road-side, and wrapping them in a fold of my cloth said, 'Mother Sāradā, tonight when you eat your puffed rice, take these with it.'... They came to see me several times at Dakṣhiṇeshwar and brought me various presents. He (Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa) behaved exactly like a son-in-law and treated them with due respect and affection. ... But although my dacoit father was as good and simple as I found him, I think that he had several previous records of brigandage."

One cannot but wonder to hear how the brigand couple were completely changed simply by the affectionate and dignified appeal of their helpless victim, a solitary woman! Surely, people professionally inured to inhuman cruelties cannot easily turn in a moment into loving benefactors of their prey. Such an immediate spiritual transformation can hardly be effected by anything less than divine manifestation. And it is up to any one to guess what part Sāradā Devī played in this affair.

The depth of her personality is revealed, moreover, by certain events connected with her life at Dakṣhiṇeshwar.

Once, during one of the later periods of her stay in the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple, when she was barely thirty, she asked Yogīn Mā, one of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's high-souled women devotees, to seek his grace on her behalf so that she might taste the beatitude of an ecstatic trance (*samādhi*). Yogīn Mā communicated Sāradā Devī's prayer to the Master, who suddenly became grave and gave no reply. On her return to the music-tower, however, she was astounded to find Sāradā Devī in an exalted mood of spiritual absorption. Yogīn Mā described her experience on the occasion in the following words: "Coming to the music-tower, I found the Mother (Sāradā Devī) seated for her daily worship. I opened the door a little and peeped in. Strange to say, she was giggling and the next moment weeping. This went on alternately for some time. Tears were rolling down her cheeks in an unceasing stream. Gradually she became very much absorbed into herself. I knew she was in *samādhi* (ecstatic trance). So I closed the door and came away. A long while after, I went again to her room. She said to me, 'Are you just returning from the Master's room?' But I asked, 'How is it, Mother, that you say you never experience *samādhi* and other high spiritual moods?' " Sāradā Devī's reply to the query was only a sweet smile.

One of these days, Yogīn Mā, who was spending a few nights in her company, observed how at dead of night Sāradā Devī fell into an ecstatic mood while listening to the music of a flute played by someone at a distance. Regarding this, Sāradā Devī said later on to her disciples, "What a wonderful mind I had at that time! Somebody used to play on the flute at night at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. As I listened to the sound, my mind would be extremely eager for the realization of God. I thought the sound was coming direct from God, and I would enter into *samādhi*." The notes of a flute, associated so closely with Shrī Kṛiṣhṇa, perhaps stirred up in her heart Shrī Rādhā's surging waves of emotion!

At about three o'clock on a moonlit night, Sāradā Devī, seated near the steps of the music-tower, became so absorbed in meditation that she did not hear the sound of the Master's slippers as he passed that way, nor did she feel that her cloth had been swept off her back by the breeze. As a matter of fact, going by the music-tower, Yogen (later Swāmī Yogānanda) was nonplussed to find her in that condition, deeply immersed in divine communion.

Besides some of the above illuminating incidents, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's general bearing towards her spotlights the superhuman make-up of her inner life. Though apparently holding the superior social position of a Hindu husband and a spiritual teacher, he would never for a moment show any lack of courtesy towards her. Once mistaking her for his niece Lakṣhmī Devī, he addressed her as 'thou' and commanded her to shut the door. But detecting his error from her voice, he was so shocked that he had to pass that night without a wink of sleep, and his mind was eased the next morning only after making proper amends. So particular was the Master even in using a single word that seemed to be rude! How correctly did Sāradā Devī portray, in later days, his behaviour towards her, saying, "I chanced to have a husband who never addressed me as 'thou'. Ah, how he treated me! Not even once did he tell me a harsh word or wound my feelings! He did not strike me even with a flower!"

Really, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's unblurred vision of the Divine Mother in Sāradā Devī explains how he could give her the liberty of doing things in her own way, even if that crossed his own explicit wishes. He would never take amiss any such non-compliance, realizing in a moment that his direction had gone against the grain of her being. Once he asked her not to allow a certain woman of ill repute to meet her; but then he complacently watched how it was not possible for the extremely compassionate heart of Sāradā Devī to deny the woman her motherly affection and blessings. On another occasion, he did not demur when a crazy woman rebuked and turned out by him was immediately called and consoled by her. Then again, the master appreciated her solicitude when she could not go by his direction of stinting one of his younger disciples in food, as required by his spiritual discipline; he was rather pleased when she guaranteed the spiritual well-being of the boy even if he was fed more liberally by her.

Moreover, the same perspective would lead Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa sometimes to go out of his way to keep Sāradā Devī in good humour. He used to say, "Her name is Sāradā. She is the incarnation of Saraswatī (Hindu goddess of learning). Therefore she likes to put on some ornaments." That was why, though the mere touch of gold or silver was intolerable to the extremely sensitive nerves of this peerless master of renunciation, he went the length of getting some nice gold ornaments made for her in order to appease her taste for wearing these. It is interesting to note that the pair of gold bangles thus made was on the pattern of what he had observed in a vision on Sītā's wrists.

Lastly, it takes one's breath away to imagine how the Master obviously dreaded anything that might go to hurt her feelings. Once it so happened that he wished to break her lavish way of giving away things at her disposal to others. But finding that she sullenly left the place, not relishing his words of caution that went against her very nature, he nervously said to his nephew, "Well, Rāmlāl, go and pacify your aunt. If she is angry, I shall be undone." Another time, long before Hṛiday's final offence to her, leading shortly to his nemesis, he had been warned by Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa with the ominous words, "Well, you often slight me. But don't you do that with her. You may be saved if the being that resides in this body 'raises its hood'; but from the wrath of the being that is in her, even Brahmā, Vishṇu and Maheshwara (the supreme triad of the Hindu pantheon) won't be able to save you."

These, however, did not turn her head. The reverse side of the above picture shows Sāradā Devī as a very humble, devoted attendant, sedulously waiting upon her beloved husband, respected guru and adored *ishṭa* (Godhead), Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa.

THE MINISTERING ANGEL

Towards the end of his life, the Master once said in a vein of humour to some of his elderly lay disciples, "Well, can you imagine what earthly purpose has been served by my marriage? Just think for a moment how I would fare if I had no wife to look after this frail body. Who else would take so much care in preparing my meals and seeing particularly that the dishes agreed with my delicate stomach?" Obviously this was a funny explanation of his marriage; but a grave truth lay in this statement so far as Sāradā Devī's contribution towards his physical well-being was concerned.

Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's life was a boon to humanity, and to protect the same, Sāradā Devī seemed to have come as a ministering angel. How to safeguard the delicate health of the great mystic was her primary concern. She practically threw self overboard and focussed all her physical and mental resources to achieve this end. She courted with pleasure any amount of hardship, discomfort or strenuous labour that came in the way. No sacrifice seemed to be too much for her, as if she had been commissioned by Providence for preserving Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's precious life at any cost, and thereby setting a brilliant example of one-pointed service of a wife to her husband, of a pupil to the spiritual teacher.

A snapshot of this aspect of her life may be viewed with interest. Hence how she lived and worked during her stay at Dakshiṇeshwar is worth recording in some detail.

Save for the brief period she spent in the separate cottage erected for her convenience, the ground floor of the music-tower continued to be her usual abode during most of the days of her stay at Dakṣhiṇeshwar. About twenty inches above the ground level, it had only one very small octagonal room, a little more than nine feet in height and having about fifty square feet of floor space. All round the room there was a narrow open veranda with a maximum width of four feet and a quarter, one of its sides lying under the staircase to the upper storey. The room had only one entrance and a pair of ventilators, but not a single window. The door was merely four feet two inches in height; indeed, it was so low that Sāradā Devī had bruised herself several times before she got used to crossing it without injury. Moreover, as the veranda was screened by rather high bamboo mats, the enclosure was practically cut off from sun and air for the sake of keeping up its privacy, as required by a *purdah* lady.

This narrow and stuffy nook within the extensive grounds of the Dakṣhiṇeshwar temple was Sāradā Devī's residence. It served the purpose of her kitchen, store-room, place for prayer and meditation as well as her bedroom, shared occasionally by some other women devotees of the Master! Such guests were lodged, after the death of the Master's mother, in a similar room on the first floor. Despite the smallness of the structure, its capacity for holding things and persons was surprisingly elastic. How she spent so many years of her life, cramping herself within this tiny cell, is something beyond the grasp of one's imagination.

And what is more surprising is that she lived in this congested space in such a way as not to be seen by others. She practically hid herself completely from public gaze. She was naturally shy, and like middle-class village women of that time she believed in the utility of the *purdah*. She learnt to lift her veil even in the presence of the Master as late as when she was twenty-five, and that at the intercession of the venerable lady hailing from Banāras during Sāradā Devī's third visit to Dakṣhiṇeshwar. As a matter of fact, till the end of her life she stuck to the veil as the invariable badge of feminine modesty. Barring a few exceptions, none of the opposite sex could ever observe her face. Perhaps, a particular direction of the Master on the decorous bearing of a gentlewoman was at the back of this rigid habit throughout her life. For Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa used to say, "When bashfulness leaves a woman, what else remains?" The obvious implication of this saying is that coyness is an armour for protecting the vital element of a woman's character, namely, chastity. Of course, the Master was liberal enough to make exceptions in the case of some of his women devotees with pronounced bias for masculine deportment. However, Sāradā Devī took particular care to adjust her daily routine so that nobody within the temple compound could notice her existence. One gets it from her own words: "The manager of the temple said, 'We have heard that she lives here, but we have never seen her.' "

It will be interesting to see how she would go unobserved through her daily round of multifarious duties. This would begin as early as three to four o'clock in the morning, and before anybody in the compound got up from bed, she would finish her bath in the Ganges and shut herself in her retreat. There, after her usual daily prayer and meditation, she would take up her main work of attending the kitchen. Preparation of food for the midday meal being over, she would proceed, during the later periods of her stay, to massage the Master with oil, when, of course, there were no visitors or devotees with him. After his bath, she would serve him dinner and engage him in light conversation so that he might not lose himself in any ecstatic mood. The spare intervals in the morning she would spend in dressing betel-rolls. In the early afternoon, she would usually dry her hair in the sun till three o'clock, sitting on the steps of the music-tower, because there would be none about the place at that hour of the day. Withdrawing herself again inside her lodging, she would trim the lamps and take up various odd duties; for, as advised by the Master, she was very particular not to waste a single moment. After her evening meditation, she would engage herself in preparing and serving the Master's supper. On the top of all these, she had to receive at times a number of women visitors, mostly devotees of the Master.

How she managed to get through such a crowded programme of work from year to year, confining herself within a cagelike enclosure and without giving any chance to outsiders to feel her existence, is really a wonder of wonders. This fact alone shows the incredible extent of physical strain she bore with pleasure for serving the Master. She appeared to have very little concern for her own food and rest. A thin, hard bed—an apology for one—would be spread out on the moist floor of her room for her meagre rest at night. It was, however, in compliance with the Master's sympathetic instructions that during the later periods she would sometimes take a short walk out of the temple compound and relax in the company of some women neighbours, choosing, of course, hours for her exit and return, through the backdoor, when none could possibly meet her in the way. But by that time her austere mode of living had been making her a prey to rheumatism that lasted throughout the rest of her life.

Preparing food for the Master was her principal item of work. So long as his mother was alive, he would take his meals with her in the music-tower, and Sāradā Devī used to serve them both. She was very particular in attending on her aged mother-in-law and spared no pains to please her. During the later periods, Sāradā Devī had to cook food also for the Master's devotees, who would come occasionally to spend a day or two in his holy company. On such occasions, she had to cook different dishes suited to the tastes of different persons, turn out quite a large quantity of food and prepare a good many betel-rolls. One of the young devotees, Lāṭu (later Swāmī Adbhutānanda), came to be a permanent inmate of the temple and assist her as far as possible in her domestic work.

However, feeding the Master demanded her greatest attention. He had a very delicate stomach. Both the quality and the quantity of his food had to be adjusted carefully, else some disorder in digestion would follow. Her sympathetic mind could read his requirements according to his varying states of body and mind. And an adept in cookery that she was, she would cook exactly those dishes that would agree with his physical need at the moment. How to nourish his body was her chief concern. That is why she would try to hide the real quantity of food and make him take more by pressing the rice on the plate, or by boiling down the milk, or by other such methods. For he was so sensitive that if he came to know that he was eating more than the usual quantity, his digestive system was sure to be upset. Sāradā Devī's skilful ways of feeding him would go to improve his health. The Master would admit this and tell her, "Just see how I am growing fat by taking the food cooked by you!" Indeed, when she was away to Kāmārpukur or Jayrāmbāṭī, the Master's stomach would go wrong, and he would send her word to come back without delay; for nobody else could be relied on for preparing suitable nourishment.

Unfathomable love for the Master was at the back of her unremitting and scrupulous service. How eagerly would she wait for the hour of carrying meals to his room and spend a little time in his blessed company! That was the only opportune moment for her to meet him who was the cynosure of her eyes! From the age of eighteen up to thirty-three, she had been off and on near the Master; yet except the few months of sharing the same bed during her first visit to Dakṣhiṇeshwar, throughout the rest of the period, the time for serving his meals continued to be her only chance of meeting him.

It rends one's heart to learn that once she had to miss even this opportunity of meeting him for two months at a stretch. One day the Master asked one of his women devotees, Golāp Mā, to bring his food. Perhaps he wanted to give her the privilege for a day only. But she went on serving his meals day after day till, after a couple of months, she was asked by the Master to stop. Evidently he did not like to deprive Sāradā Devī any longer of her only chance of meeting him. Although, during this time, she keenly felt the loss of her precious moments of enlivening contact with the Master, she was magnanimous enough not to say a single word by way of checking Golāp Mā's eagerness to serve him in that way. It was not for her to assert her claims as a wife to occupy a closer place than any one of his devotees.

To look after his health, to hear his voice and to see him from a distance would fill her heart with intense joy. She had no other craving. She would make small holes in the screen of bamboo mats and through these enjoy the exhilarating scenes of devotional songs and ecstatic dances of the Master together with his devotees; and for this she would be on her legs for hours on the veranda of the music-tower.

Engrossed in her labour of love, her heart would always remain pinned to the Master. Her mind would hover about him so closely and constantly as to enable her to hear from a distance what he said even very softly in his own room. When one of his young devotees (later Swāmī Triguṇātītānanda) went to the music-tower, as directed by him, to get his fare for his return trip to Calcutta, he found, to his surprise, the required money already deposited by her outside the entrance. On another occasion, when the Master, asking Naren (later Swāmī Vivekānanda) to take his food there, came to the music-tower to inform Sāradā Devī about this, he was astonished to see that she had already started preparing Naren's favourite dishes. This shows the potency of immaculate love that made her live very close to the Master on the mental plane, though physically she was away in her anchorite's cell.

Spiritual love, intense and selfless, made her heart beat in unison with that of the Master. Renunciation was their common forte. The Master was highly pleased to find that she also refused to accept an offer of a large sum of money made by a merchant devotee for his upkeep on a higher standard—an offer that had already been turned down by him. On another occasion, when she chose not to accompany him in a journey by boat with a number of devotees of both sexes to a festival at Pānihāṭi, several miles up the Ganges, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa highly appreciated her wise decision.

The last event occurred in June, 1885, when the Master had already developed the fatal cancer in the throat. After he attended this festival with his usual devotional songs, dances and ecstatic trances, the disease took a serious turn. Sāradā Devī became extremely anxious about his declining health. She took off most of her ornaments, and tried to nurse him with greater vigilance so that he might recover.

In October of that year the Master was removed, for facilities of medical treatment, to a rented house at Shyāmpukur, a northern quarter of Calcutta. In this small double-storeyed building in a congested locality, he was kept only for a couple of months, and nursed by a batch of his young disciples in addition to the ever-watchful Sāradā Devī. She would prepare his diet, feed him as also run the establishment, managing all the while adroitly to keep herself out of sight of the male attendants except a select few like Lāṭu and senior Gopāl. And it was really a feat; for her kitchen was in a terrace on the top of the building, where she would retire in the early dawn, long before others left their beds; she would serve his diet after his room was cleared of other attendants and visitors; at dead of night she would come down from the roof of her apartment on the first floor and sleep there for about three hours only. Indeed, it looked as if an invisible lady stood vigilantly at the helm of the entire process of care-taking of the saintly patient!

In December, under the advice of physicians, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was removed to a spacious garden-house with plenty of fresh air and light at Cossipore, a northern suburb of Calcutta. Here most of his young disciples gathered together to nurse him back to health, the elderly ones met the expenses, while Sāradā Devī, dwelling in the same house and aided by Golāp Mā, carried on silently the management from behind the scenes. After a brief spell of partial recovery in this new setting, the Master relapsed into an alarming condition. By August of the following year, when medical remedies proved abortive, Sāradā Devī rushed to the holy place of Tārakeshwar in order to make a supreme effort for getting him cured through divine grace. She lay there for a couple of days with a vow of fast and vigil for propitiating the deity. Late in the second night, she heard a sudden crash, as of a pile of earthen pots smashed by a cudgel. Miraculously, that strange sound switched her mind off from all earthly attachments, and in a mood of utter resignation to divine dispensation, she returned to find the Master rapidly approaching the dire end.

On the Wings of Ecstasy

On the 16th August, 1886, it was declared by experts that the lingering superconscious trance of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa was no more to be got over, for this time it had led to his final exit from the mortal body. This sad news cast a deep gloom on the hearts of his devotees in and about Calcutta. Being painfully conscious of her irretrievable loss, Sāradā Devī came disconsolately out of her enclosure to the Master's bed-side and cried aloud like a bereaved child, "Mother! O Divine Mother! for what fault of mine have you departed leaving me here?" But it was only for once that she gave vent to her irrepressible grief in that way; immediately after that, as she was conducted to her own room, she reined her feelings and resigned herself to a solemn silence.

Next day when she was going to take off the bangles from her wrists to put on the widow's garb, the Master suddenly appeared and stopped her, saying, "Where have I gone? I have just shifted from one room to another." This vision assured her that her hallowed husband had not forsaken her, and that she was not to dress and behave like a widow, as required by social usage.

Though the Master's ethereal visit, so soon after his passing away, solaced her to some extent, yet the very idea of her physical separation from him sat heavy on her. With a lacerated heart she moved out of the Cossipore garden-house after five days, spent a little more than a week in the Calcutta house of Balarām Bose, one of the Master's lay disciples, and on the 30th August she went out with a group of devotees on tour of pilgrimage in northern India. Visiting Baidyanāth, Banāras and Ayodhyā on the way, the party proceeded straight to Vṛindāvan, where she stayed on for about a year.

Mention may be made here that in Banāras, while attending the evening service of Vishwanātha (the Lord of the universe), she became absorbed in spiritual ecstasy and felt that the Master, taking her by the hand, conducted her back to her temporary lodging. Again, in the train heading towards Vṛindāvan, she saw the Master appearing at the window and asking her to take care of his sacred, gold amulet (*ishṭa-kavacha*) that had been given to her during his last illness and that was then on her arm.

In spite of these visions of the Master, the very air of Vṛindāvan, charged with the heart-rending pathos of Shrī Rādhā's pangs of separation from her beloved Shrī Kṛishṇa, worked vehemently on her aggrieved mind. It blew off altogether her dam of patience, and a flood of tears overwhelmed her. Indeed, during the earlier days of her sojourn in that holy place, she seems to have repeated the excruciating history of her earlier compeer!

Before long, the Master appeared before her and said, "Why are you weeping so much? Where have I gone? Here I am." Such repeated contacts with the Master on the subtle plane made her feel his constant presence by her side and filled her with the intense delight of spiritual union. One day she lost herself completely in an ecstatic trance, when she behaved exactly as the Master would have done in that mood. After descending to the normal plane, she said that her identity had, during the *samādhi* (trance), been merged in that of the Master.

As a sequel to all these spiritual realizations, a radical change came over her mental outlook. Absolutely free from grief or any painful memory of separation from the Master, she went about visiting temples and behaved in every way like a happy little girl. She seemed to be sailing all the while on an ocean of bliss, and it was spirit and not matter that directed her course. At times, carried away by the emotional urge of Shrī Rādhā, she would stray away without anybody's knowledge to the bank of the Yamunā, from where her companions would have to find her out and bring her back.

It may be mentioned that in the temple of Rādhāramaṇa, frequently visited by her, she earnestly prayed to the deity for a peculiar favour. Instead of asking for anything material, she begged that the faults and foibles of other persons might escape her notice. And her subsequent life, characterized by limitless compassion, proves unmistakably that her supplication had been granted.

Presently, the Master bewildered her by asking her to initiate one of his young devotees, Yogen (later Swāmī Yogānanda), who was then staying there as one of her attendants. The same advice came through visions repeated on three consecutive nights, and naturally, in spite of her shyness and hesitation to pose as a guru (spiritual teacher), she had to give in. In these visions she also got from the Master the *mantra* (sacred formula representing the chosen ideal of the disciple) suited to Yogen. Sāradā Devī, who had never before spoken to this young attendant of hers nor lifted her veil before him, commenced her first act of spiritual ministry of initiating him in an exalted mood.

Once, in the Cossipore garden-house, Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa had a significant talk with her. When he said to her, "Well, won't you do anything? Am I to do all?" she replied, "I am a woman. What can I do?" At this the Master made a prophetic utterance, "No, no, you have much to do." Through such invigorating memories of the past, probably, she began to realize the truth of the Master's prediction that she was to be the spiritual guide of hundreds of spiritual children (disciples). However, with Swāmī Yogānanda's initiation in Vṛindāvan, she stepped into that phase of her life.

Before leaving Vṛindāvan after a year of constant spiritual absorption, Sāradā Devī, in spite of the rheumatism in her legs, undertook like all other pilgrims a walk of several miles round the place and its environs. During this journey, her companions like Yogīn Mā found her observing the surroundings very closely and stopping all of a sudden at certain places. It looked as if she was in the grip of some sweet memories of a bygone life called up suddenly by the sights on her way!

Getting away from Vṛindāvan, she ended this tour of pilgrimage by consigning some relics of the Master to the sacred waters of the Brahmakuṇḍa at Hardwār and his hair to those of Triveṇī (confluence of the Ganges and Yamunā) at Allāhābād.

Back to Kāmārpukur *via* Calcutta some time in the second half of 1887, she had to face a critical situation. Coming to the village for the first time after the passing away of her husband, she had to reckon the fact that any transgression of social regulations would not be condoned by the rural folk, every one of whom had an eye on what others would be doing. As a matter of fact, some of them were looking askance at her mode of dress, which differed from a widow's, and let loose their carping tongues. Hence, though repeated spiritual realizations fortified her belief that she was not to go by the social rules meant for the common run of women, yet she did not want to make herself a target of evil gossip among the thoughtless villagers with their pharisaical outlook. That was why she made here another attempt to dress herself as a widow; but she failed as the Master again asked her not to do so. This time she saw with open eyes the Master coming towards her in a procession with many people, including some of his outstanding devotees, and that a stream gushed out of his feet and surged forward. She plucked handfuls of flowers from a neighbouring tree and offered the same into the holy stream. By this phenomenal intuitive perception she became convinced, once for all, that her consort was none other than the Lord Vishṇu from whose lotus feet had sprung out the holy Ganges. This confirmed her belief that she was not a widow, for, as the Vaishṇava scriptures say, "One who is wedded to Kṛishṇa (God Incarnate) can never be a widow." So, instead of bowing down to the vain sticklers for social conventions, she stood firmly on this rock of faith. The pair of gold bangles and cloth with hairlike red borders continued to be marked features of her simple attire up to the last moment of her life. The scandal-mongers were, however, hushed by Prasannamayī, a respected daughter of the neighbouring zemindar family, as she pronounced unequivocally, "The wife of Gadāi (Gadādhar) is a veritable goddess. She is not an ordinary type of woman."

Sāradā Devī's life at Kāmārpukur at this time reminds one of the tale of Sītā's hard days in exile. She had to live alone in the house and feel acutely the pinch of poverty. She had to husk paddy and raise vegetables, and somehow boil these for her meals. She had not the wherewithal to purchase even salt. But she silently accepted all this as a necessary course of austerity remembering the Master's instruction during his last days, "After my time, you go to Kāmārpukur, live upon whatever you get—be it mere boiled rice and greens—and spend your time in repeating the name of Hari (God)." She literally followed this prescription, never saying a word about her hardship to anybody, not even to her mother at Jayrāmbāṭī, and spent her days in divine communion.

The disciples of the Master, lay and monastic, seemed for a time to have forgotten her existence altogether. The terrible shock of physical separation from their adored guru shook off all their earthly attachments, and rushed them through a frenzied quest of realizing the Divine. Moreover, none of them could picture the precarious situation in which Sāradā Devī had been placed at Kāmārpukur. Somehow, through the sympathetic neighbour, Prasannamayī, the news of this miserable state of things leaked out and reached the ears of the Master's devotees in Calcutta. At once they begged Sāradā Devī to come over to that city. That was nearly at the end of a year of her *tapasyā* (austerity) at Kāmārpukur. By that time, however, she had traversed the last stretch of her ascent to spiritual motherhood. That phase of her life, into which she had stepped by initiating her first disciple in Vṛindāvan, now became mature and steady.

In response to the earnest invitation of the Master's devotees, who were her children, as Prasannamayī asserted on that occasion, Sāradā Devī reached Calcutta probably in May, 1888. Soon after her arrival, Yogīn Mā found her one day in an ecstatic trance on the roof of Balarām Bābu's house, where she had been meditating. Coming down to the normal plane, she narrated to Yogīn Mā how her mind had soared during that state to a strange region, where everybody was all affection to her, and she, transfigured with heavenly beauty, was tenderly made to sit by the side of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, when she found herself immersed in unspeakable bliss. "Coming down from that exalted plane," she said in continuation, "I found my body lying there. I thought, 'How will it be possible for me to enter that ugly body?' I could hardly induce my mind to do so. After a long while I succeeded, and then the body stirred again with life."

Shortly after, when Sāradā Devī was spending a few months, till October of that year, in Nīlāmbar Bābu's rented house at Belur, accompanied by Golāp Mā and Yogīn Mā, they observed her once in a state of the deepest superconscious trance (*nirvikalpa samādhi*). She sat there for a long while with her body perfectly still, without any sign of life. When she was on the point of regaining normal consciousness, she cried out, "O Yogen, where are my hands? Where are my feet?" Yogīn Mā had to press her limbs to make her conscious of her hands and feet; it was after a long time that she became aware of her body.

Mention may be made here incidentally that during her second stay in this house in 1893, Sāradā Devī together with Yogīn Mā performed the austere observance known as *pañchatapā* (the ordeal of five fires). Four fires were kindled in four quarters, each at a distance of about five cubits from their seats; these with the sun overhead composed the five fires. Early in the morning after their usual ablutions in the Ganges they would enter the arena and sit in meditation till dusk. For five consecutive days they went through this ordeal. It made their bodies look like burnt logs.

About this time, Sāradā Devī had a unique and highly significant vision. She saw Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa stepping into the Ganges, probably for a dip. But she was perplexed to find that his body went on dissolving in that holy stream as he waded deeper and deeper. When his entire body melted in this way and became one with the Ganges, she saw that Narendranāth (Swāmī Vivekānanda) was taking the holy waters and sprinkling the same in all directions on innumerable people shouting "Glory to Rāmakṛiṣhṇa."

What a symbolic prevision of the apostolic mission of Swāmī Vivekānanda that was soon to unfold itself!

THE HOLY MOTHER

The visions and ecstasies of Sāradā Devī could be observed only by her very intimate companions like Yogīn Mā and Golāp Mā. They had seen her in various exalted moods in Dakṣhiṇeshwar and Vṛindāvan. But this time when she came to Calcutta in 1888 and spent a few months after her austerities in Kāmārpukur, these close devotees were awe-struck to notice a momentous change in her mental outlook and behaviour. Her mind, scarcely conscious of the surroundings, would almost always remain within its depths. Her face, beaming with a unique heavenly grace, would radiate peace and joy all about her. With perfect repose and exceptionally sweet and dignified bearing, she appeared altogether in a new light. And shortly these spiritually advanced souls came to realize the significance of this phenomenal change in her being. They felt that, established firmly on the pedestal of spiritual motherhood and urged by superhuman compassion, Sāradā Devī was about to release her divine power of helping numerous people out of nescience (*avidyā*).

Before long, a similar conviction came to be rooted in the minds of the Master's lay and monastic disciples. Some of them had a kind of intuitive inkling regarding her innate spiritual power matching that of the Master. However, by degrees the entire group seemed to discover in her a refuge in the tearing storm raised by the passing away of their beloved Master. They came to see how she appeared, at the psychological moment of their terrible mental depression, as a godsend destined to fill up the place left vacant by their adored and bewailed spiritual guide. Relieved by this inspiring thought, they rallied round Sāradā Devī, the immaculate consort of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa and the immediate standard-bearer of his faith, and hailed the 'firm and serene soul' as the 'Holy Mother.'

The Master's disciples took upon themselves the sacred duty of providing everything for her modest living, so that she might continue long to bless as many spiritual aspirants as possible. Some of them considered it a rare privilege to be allowed to render any service to the Holy Mother. With unstinted devotion, Swāmī Yogānanda, her first disciple, aided sometimes by Swāmī Adbhutānanda and Swāmī Advaitānanda, continued to serve as her chief attendant till he passed away in 1899. Next came Swāmī Triguṇātītānanda, and after a short period Swāmī Sāradānanda, who went on managing things for her ease and comfort with extraordinary care till the last day of her life. The lay disciples of the Master, particularly Balarām Bose and Mahendranāth Gupta (author of *The Gospel of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa*), and later on some of her own disciples, used to meet the moderate expenses of her living.

Thus securely placed by the devoted care of the Master's disciples, the Holy Mother, at the age of thirty-five, began in right earnest her spiritual ministration to all and sundry that craved her grace. The mighty stream of spirituality that had been flowing unobserved beneath the surface came to open view by this time and overflowed to quench the thirst of many an aspiring soul!

Indeed, her initiation of disciples was a vital process, charging them, as it were, with powerful currents from a spiritual powerhouse of unlimited capacity! Let us quote some of her own statements regarding this matter: "The power of the guru is transmitted through the *mantra* (sacred formula for repetition) to the disciple. That is why the guru at the time of initiation takes on himself the sins of the disciple, and suffers so much from physical maladies;" "Whatever I have to give, I have given at the time of initiation. If you want peace immediately, practise the spiritual disciplines prescribed. Otherwise you will achieve it only at the fall of the body;" "Many of those who come here have very bad records in life. No type of sin has been left uncommitted by them. But when they come and address me as mother, I forget everything, and they get more than they deserve."

These are no empty words. Her vicarious physical sufferings were witnessed by many. She had often to wash her feet with the water of the Ganges for allaying the excruciating pain caused by the touch of an impure person saluting her. She related one such experience to a disciple in this graphic way: "A rather elderly man came here with X. Seeing him from a distance, I entered my room and sat on my bed. He was very anxious to salute me by touching my feet. Though I demurred and shrank back, he touched my feet by force, as it were. From that time I have been suffering almost the pangs of death due to an unbearable pain in the feet and the stomach. I washed my feet three or four times; still I have not been able to get rid of this burning sensation. Had you been here, you could have read my mind from my gesture and forbidden him to touch my feet." Once she explained this phenomenon to Yogīn Mā, saying, "Some people touch my feet, and that refreshes me much. Again there are others whose touch gives me a terrible burning sensation. I feel it like the sting of a wasp. Only by applying the Ganges water do I get some relief."

But in spite of such intolerable sufferings, she was loath to deprive the depressed souls of the inevitable relief they would get by touching her feet or by getting initiation from her. Sometimes, while narrating her agony due to an impure touch, she would add, "But don't tell this to Sharat (Swāmī Sāradānanda). Then he will stop people from coming." Moved by boundless compassion, the Holy Mother seemed to be bearing the cross for the redemption of many an erring son or daughter! That was verily the mission of her life. One day, during her last illness, one of her monastic disciples said to another within her hearing, "If Mother recovers this time, we shall not allow her to give initiation any more. She is suffering so much because of taking upon herself the sins of all sorts of people." At this the emaciated, bedridden Holy Mother humorously interposed with a benign smile, "Why do you say so? Do you think that Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa came only to take sweets?"

The Holy Mother had an undimmed view of her mission up to the end of her life. Had not the Master, on the eve of his departure, said to her, "The people around live like worms in darkness, you should look after them"? Fresh in her mind were the various dynamic *mantras* imparted to her by Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa and meant for different groups of persons with varying temperaments and aptitudes. So she went on fulfilling her mission with indomitable zeal and patience. Hardly could she refuse anyone that came to seek her blessings. It was not for her to pick and choose the disciples, as had been done by the Master. The latter reared a few spiritual stalwarts through whom the import of his life and teachings was to spread all over the globe. The Holy Mother's task appeared to be different. She was to save hundreds of distressed souls through her active ministry covering the remaining thirty-two years of her life. Once she said to Yogīn Mā, "He (the Master) picked out the best of children, and with what care did he select them! And towards me he has pushed all this small fry, coming in their hundreds like ants. Don't compare my disciples with his." This saying, though uttered facetiously, underlines the nature of her duty as a guru as compared to that of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa. And this indicates what a tremendous power she had for delivering numerous disciples of questionable spiritual calibre. Indeed, Swāmī Premānanda, one of the towering monastic disciples of the Master, gave out the bare truth when he said, "We are sending to the Holy Mother the poison that we cannot ourselves swallow. She is the refuge of them all, for she is able to take and assimilate their sins." However, this was why all kinds of people from various parts of the country would come to be blessed by her initiation.

For receiving these spiritual aspirants coming from far and near, the Holy Mother would usually divide her days every year almost equally between Calcutta and the country-side. For some years Kāmārpukur continued to be her village retreat, from where she would visit Jayrāmbāṭī and spend a few days there, particularly during the Jagaddhātrī-*pujā* festival. But later on, her paternal house at Jayrāmbāṭī came to be her permanent rural abode. Here she lived with her brothers till 1915, by which year she had, through the efforts of Swāmī Sāradānanda, a separate thatched house of her own close to her former residence. Since 1911 she would, during her sojourns at Jayrāmbāṭī, put up for a while in the Jagadambā Āshrama, at the neighbouring village of Koālpārā, inaugurated by her in that year.

For a little over twenty years, her residence in or near Calcutta would be one or other rented house close to either bank of the Ganges. Such lodgings would usually be located at Bāghbāzār or Shyāmbāzār, in the northern quarter of the city, or at Belur or Ghusuri, on the other side of the river. When, however, she came to Calcutta only for a short stay, she would usually put up in the house of Balarām Bose, and on a few occasions in that of Mahendranāth Gupta. But from May 23 of 1909 throughout the rest of her life, the house erected for her at Bāghbāzār through the strenuous efforts of Swāmī Sāradānanda continued to be her Calcutta residence. It may be mentioned that this building still goes by the name of 'Mother's House'.

OUTSIDE THE ORBIT

During the period of her spiritual ministry, however, on a few occasions the Holy Mother moved out of her usual orbit round the city and the country-side by way of visiting some places of pilgrimage or salubrious health resorts.

The first of these journeys occurred as early as November, 1888, after about six months' stay in Nīlāmbar Bābu's house at Belur. Escorted by Swāmī Brahmānanda, Swāmī Yogānanda and Swāmī Sāradānanda, the Holy Mother, with a number of lady devotees, made a tedious journey, by steamer up to Cuttack and thence by bullock cart, to pay her homage to Jagannātha in the seaside town of Purī. The party put up in a house belonging to Balarām Bose's family and stayed there for a little over two months.

Though she was a guest of Hariballabh Bose, a well-to-do, prominent advocate of Cuttack, and was therefore esteemed even by the priests of the temple, the Holy Mother behaved all the while like a very humble pilgrim. When she was offered a palanquin by one of the senior priests for carrying her comfortably to the temple, she said, "You lead me to the temple, and I shall go after you just like a lowly pauper to pay my respects to Jagannātha, the Lord of the universe." As a matter of fact, she visualized herself as a devoted attendant of the deity seated in leonine majesty on the high altar.

One day, the Holy Mother did a curious thing. As Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa had not visited the temple, she carried his photograph concealed under her garment and held it before the image of Jagannātha. She alone could say how by this apparently funny procedure Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's deficiency was made up! The mystic's angle of vision differs materially from that of the earth-bound souls; for through it, images and portraits, instead of remaining just inert lumps of matter, may be observed to be instinct with life. Undoubtedly, to the Holy Mother her action appeared to be quite a natural one for serving the purpose she had in view.

According to an entry in Mahendranāth Gupta's diary, it was on the 25th March, 1890, that the Holy Mother made a short trip to Gayā *via* Baidyanāth and came back to Calcutta on the 2nd of the following month. Escorted by Swāmī Advaitānanda, she went there to offer oblations in the temple for Chandramaṇi Devī, the deceased mother of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, as the latter had directed her to do. After finishing her ritualistic duties, she visited Bodh-Gayā, the neighbouring sacred site of Buddha's enlightenment. Seeing the provisions in the monastery there run by Hindu monks, her motherly solicitude for the monastic disciples of the Master was stirred up. Later on she narrated her reaction with these moving words: "I went to see the monastery of Bodh-Gayā. It was filled with various articles, and the monks did not suffer for want of funds. After seeing this I often wept before the Master and prayed, 'O Lord, my children (the monastic disciples of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa) have no place to lay their heads in. They have very little to eat. They trudge from door to door for a morsel of food. May they have a place like this!' Subsequently the Belur Maṭh was established through the grace of the Master." It is interesting to note that in November of 1898, within only a little above eight years, the Holy Mother consecrated the Belur Maṭh grounds, and that the monastery was set going by the end of the following year.

However, in 1894, the Holy Mother, attended by a lady devotee and three great monastic disciples of the Master, accompanied Balarām Bose's ailing wife Kṛiṣhṇabhāminī to the bracing climate of a Bihār village, Koilwār. There she spent about two months. While enjoying like a child the fascinating view of herds of wild deer roaming at large and suddenly scampering on the wings of the wind, her heart, however, melted to witness the appalling misery of the local people. This reminds one of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's heart-rending experience, while travelling with Mathur, at the sight of the famished people at Baidyanāth and also at one of the latter's estates in north Bengal.

Next time she spent the first quarter of 1895 in a pilgrimage to Banāras and Vṛindāvan. She was accompanied by Yogīn Mā and Golāp Mā as well as her brothers and her mother, Shyāmāsundarī, for whom in particular this tour was probably organized. Swāmī Yogānanda served as a guide to the party. It is said that she brought from Vṛindāvan a little image of Bāla-Gopāla (Baby-Kṛiṣhṇa), which she started worshipping only after receiving, in a vision, an affectionate appeal from the deity to that effect.

After a fairly long interval, towards the end of 1904, the Holy Mother went to Purī, under the care of Swāmī Premānanda, with a big party of devotees as well as relatives comprising her mother, her uncle Nīlmādhav, some of her brothers and the wives of them all. It may be mentioned that shortly after their return from the holy seat of Jagannātha, her uncle Nīlmādhav died, and her mother Shyāmāsundarī passed away after about a year in January, 1906. This pilgrimage appears to have been a timely boon to these blessed souls, who were to depart so soon after that.

Six years after this tour, the Holy Mother visited Koṭhār, within the family estate of Balarām Bose in Orissa, and spent about two months in that healthy place. There the local postmaster, a Bengalee Christian, being anxious to come back to his original faith of Hinduism, sought her blessings, and he was reconverted under her direction and initiated by her. At Koṭhār she also made a number of other disciples, some of them hailing from distant places like Shillong in Assam.

From there she proceeded, in February, 1911, to Madras with eight companions in order to visit some of the prominent holy places in south India. Swāmī Rāmakṛishṇānanda, a towering monastic disciple of the Master and the founder-abbot of the first Rāmakṛishṇa Maṭh (monastery) in the south, made all possible arrangements for her comfortable journey up to Rāmeshwaram, very near the southern end of the country. The party sojourned for a month at Madras, putting up in a rented house close to the Rāmakṛishṇa Maṭh at Mylapore. Here a number of persons of both sexes, including an American devotee who happened then to be an inmate of the Rāmakṛishṇa Maṭh, were favoured by the Holy Mother with initiation. During her stay in the city many people came to visit her, and she was glad to notice among them a striking number of educated women.

From Madras the party started for Rāmeshwaram with Swāmī Rāmakṛishṇānanda as the guide. On the way they halted for a day at Madurā and visited the magnificent old temple of Shiva and the goddess Mīnākṣhī. Next night they reached their destination, and spent three days in that sacred place. Here, under the express order of the Raja of Rāmnāḍ, a disciple of Swāmī Vivekānanda, the Holy Mother together with all her women companions had the privilege of touching and worshipping the deity, Rāmeshwara, whom none but the temple priests were allowed to approach in close quarters. The Holy Mother was exceedingly delighted to offer to Shiva one hundred and eight *bael* leaf-patterns made of gold, procured by Swāmī Rāmakṛiṣhṇānanda.

Back to Madras, the Holy Mother proceeded, after a while, to Bangalore, where she sanctified the local Rāmakṛiṣhṇa Āshrama by her stay there for about four days. Referring to this visit she said later on, "What a crowd I met at Bangalore! People began to shower flowers as I got down from the train. Flowers lay thick on the road. The message of the Master has spread everywhere; therefore so many people come."

She reached Calcutta on April 11, 1911, spending on the way one day at Rajahmundry for a bath in the holy Godāvarī, and two days at Purī. During this pilgrimage the Holy Mother was very much pleased to receive Swāmī Rāmakṛiṣhṇānanda's devoted care. It may be mentioned that this exemplary service to her was the swan-song of the saintly Swāmī, who passed away within a few months of the Holy Mother's return.

However, after this southern tour, she deviated from her usual rounds between Calcutta and the country-side only for once. And that was in 1912, when she went to Banāras for the third time and stayed there from early November till the middle of January of the following year. Swāmī Brahmānanda, the pre-eminent first Head of the Rāmakṛiṣhṇa Order of monks, was there to look after her comfort. Suitable arrangements were made so that the Holy Mother might visit, in a leisurely way, all the important temples in the city as well as other places of interest about it.

One may very well jot down the course of her pilgrimage and sightseeing, but one can hardly chart the reactions stirred up in her mind on these occasions. These remained hidden in her bosom, except when one or two hints came out of her lips. It is up to any one to guess from such cryptic utterances what actually she saw and felt. Thus, regarding the figure of Kedārnāth she said, "This Kedār and the Kedār in the Himālayas are related to each other. If one visits this, one really visits the other. In this figure one finds a living presence of the deity." Then again, seeing some Westerners gazing with amazement at the relics of Buddhism in the archaeological excavations at Sārnāth, the Holy Mother exclaimed, "These are the people who built this place in a previous birth; and now they are wonder-struck by their own performance in a bygone age."

The Holy Mother honoured by her presence the Rāmakṛishṇa Mission Home of Service that was about to grow into a premier philanthropic institution in the shape of a free hospital at Banāras. She was highly pleased to go round the different wards, and blessed the undertaking with the pregnant utterance, "The Master is present here, and Mother Lakṣhmī (the goddess of prosperity), too, is abiding here in all her glory. . . . The place looks so nice that I should like to stay here permanently."

One interesting episode in connection with this sojourn of the Holy Mother at Banāras deserves mention. A phaeton was arranged for her to go to Sārnāth with party, but it being late in arriving, she started in a hired vehicle. Swāmī Brahmānanda was sorry for this, and followed in the phaeton. While returning, he requested the Holy Mother to take the carriage meant for her. She said that the other vehicle was good enough for her, and that the Swāmī should return in the same carriage in which he had come. But finally she was prevailed upon to occupy the phaeton. But on the way, it so happened that the horse having bolted, the vehicle occupied by the Swāmī was overturned, and he was slightly bruised. Regarding this incident the Holy Mother said: "I was to be involved in the accident, but Rākhāl (Swāmī Brahmānanda) volunteered to take it on himself. Otherwise the consequence might have been disastrous." With her penetrating insight she could see how the mystical foresight of the Swāmī worked behind the scenes for warding off the danger that was about to come upon her.

Thus escorted and guarded vigilantly by the great monastic disciples of the Master, the Holy Mother had gone through the above brief schedule of excursions. Her humble yet dignified bearing as a pilgrim, her childlike gaiety in relishing natural beauties on the way or in the places of her sojourn, strikingly mark this phase of her life. How one wishes to have a peep into the depths of her heart and gauge her feelings when she would visit the deity in a temple or come across captivating scenes of Nature!

GRACE ABOUNDING

From 1888 onwards the Holy Mother's life moved like a perennial freshet of universal goodwill. She had so many children about her, and as days went on, their number multiplied. And spiritually they varied in their stature from the giant to the dwarf. The Master's disciples, mostly pure and advanced souls, were her children as well, and so also were the humblest of her own ones. Nay, she was the mother of even those spiritual toddlers who would come to seek her blessings only for gaining some material ends. Though the contact of her pure children was quite refreshing and welcome to her, yet the worst sinner was no less her child deserving her unstinted affection and grace.

With what prescience Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa had assured Ṣhyāmāsundarī that her daughter would have so many children that she would be tired of meeting their demands! And this prediction came too true. Towards the closing years of her life, the rush of all sorts of people to her Calcutta house to receive her blessings was so heavy as to irritate her nerves. On one occasion, after a batch of worldly women had left her presence, she could not resist speaking out to a lady disciple, thus pathetically describing the agony of bearing the cross. She said, "My child, please fan me a little. The whole body is burning. My obeisance to your Calcutta! People come here and lay before me catalogues of their sorrows. Again there are others who have committed so many hideous sins. . . . people have been streaming here today since four o'clock in the afternoon. I cannot bear to see the misery of people any more."

Indeed, her heart overflowing with human kindness would smart whenever she listened to anybody's tale of woe. Why, the piteous wail of a poor woman beaten by her husband, or even that of a calf separated from its mother, would torment her and move her instantly to relieve the oppressed ones.

Someone's husband was ailing, somebody's child was on the point of death, someone was being tormented by a recent bereavement, one was being pinched by poverty, or perhaps one was craving to have a child born to her—all such people would run up to her, seeking her blessings for immediate relief. She could hardly refuse any of them. She would ask them to pray to God, and sometimes she would herself supplicate on their behalf to the Master. And usually all of them would get the desired divine help.

Some persons would assail her compassionate heart by distressing accounts of their own sins. And generally without any hesitation, she would take even a repentant reprobate under her wing. A woman of a respectable family, for instance, having strayed away from the correct path, stood one day at the Holy Mother's door and did not dare to defile her room by her sinful presence. Bursting into tears, she confessed to the Mother all that she had done and begged piteously to be relieved of the unbearable sting of conscience. With great sympathy, the Holy Mother advanced towards her and affectionately putting her arms round her neck said, "Come, my child, come into the room. You have had the bitter taste of sin and become penitent. Come, I shall initiate you. Offer all your past misdeeds at the sacred feet of the Master and cast off all fears." On another occasion, she simply stunned by her compassionate words a nagging enthusiast for discipline who requested her to ban a certain misbehaving young disciple from coming to her presence. Said she, "If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him on my lap?" Indeed, similar facts may be picked up at random from any portion of the Holy Mother's life during the period of her spiritual ministry.

Many would approach her for help in their struggle against evil tendencies or some inveterate bad habits. By her unfailing grace they would receive what they wanted. There are instances when persons were saved in this way from the clutch of inordinate passion or some unworthy deep-rooted habit. Usually, however, the Holy Mother preferred to initiate such afflicted souls and leave them to gather strength and purity gradually through prescribed spiritual exercises. It was only in extreme cases that, moved by profound sympathy, she would go out of her way to release her dynamic will for delivering a helpless victim of devouring passion.

One may obtain an idea of the potency of the Holy Mother's will from what Swāmī Sāradānanda said one day to one of his disciples. When he was asked why he took so much time to initiate a disciple, while the Holy Mother finished this within a few minutes, the Swāmī said, "The very touch or will of the Holy Mother guarantees that the disciple is resigned to and accepted by the

Master, whereas I have to spend some time in meditation before receiving any assurance of that kind." Indeed, a glance, a touch or a will of the Holy Mother was sufficient to alter the course of a disciple's life. The capacity of wielding such a tremendous spiritual power, according to Swāmī Vivekānanda, marks out a divine Incarnation from the galaxy of perfected souls.

This was why the Holy Mother was not very particular about following any set rituals while initiating a spiritual aspirant. Nor was she fastidious in choosing the time and place of the ceremony. Usually she would perform it in the chapel after her morning worship. But she initiated many either on the veranda of her Calcutta residence or under the eaves of her village home. And this she would do at any hour of the day considered fit by her according to circumstances. There are instances when she initiated some one in an open meadow, taking her seat on a bit of straw, and another in the compound of a railway station, sitting under an umbrella and using for purification rain water collected in small holes on the ground.

Indeed, like a blazing fire, she could immediately kindle spiritual fervour in any number of aspiring souls. Hence she could very well afford to rise above social conventions. A period of mourning, for instance, is considered by the Hindus to be unholy and therefore unsuitable for any auspicious event like initiation; but the Holy Mother ruled out such prohibition, saying, "There is no connection between the spirit and the body. The talk of defilement due to death is meaningless." And she actually initiated persons during such periods. Nor would she mind even if one had not taken the usual bath before initiation. Thus her blessings, issuing out of the eternal stream of love within her, would be showered on an aspirant, irrespective of apparently unfavourable outward conditions. There was no bar against any sex, caste, community, or nationality so long as the individual was sincere. To her it was the spirit within that weighed more than external forms and observances.

And she knew perfectly well what a responsible task fell on her when she received anybody as a disciple. Once, during her last days, a disciple got alarmed at the thought of having to lose her in the near future, and piteously described to her the helpless state to which he would be brought in case she left the mortal body. At this the Holy Mother assured him compassionately with a highly significant utterance, "If the Master desires me to leave this body, do you think that I shall have rest as long as a single one of my disciples remains to be emancipated from the bondage of the world? I have to be with them. I have taken upon myself the burden of their weal and woe. Is initiation a mere trifle? What a heavy weight the guru has to carry on his shoulders! How anxiously one has to think for the disciple's well-being!"

Indeed, the Holy Mother was very particular about praying every day for the well-being of her disciples. Even during her fatal illness she was observed to wake up at two o'clock at night and repeat the name of the Lord for a long while. And this she used to do when it was not possible for her even to sit up on the bed! Noticing this, a disciple asked her whether she had no refreshing sleep at night. To this came the surprising reply, "How can I have that, my child? All these children come to me with great longing and take initiation, but most of them do not practise *japa* regularly. Why regularly? They do not do anything at all. But since I have taken their responsibility, should I not see to their welfare? Therefore, I do *japa* for their sake, and pray to the Master constantly, saying, 'O Lord, awaken their consciousness. Give them liberation. There is a great deal of suffering in this world. May they not be born again!' "

Moreover, recorded facts about the subjective experience of a number of persons go to prove that her grace would sometimes flow on the mental plane across the barriers of time and space. Some who had never come across even a portrait of hers saw her in dreams as a goddess in flesh and blood. Some others were blessed with initiation by her in dreams; and when they actually met her, she gave them the same *mantras* (spiritual formulae) which they had received in their sub-conscious states. A few disciples of hers claim to have been saved from imminent danger by the Holy Mother appearing before them in visions. Girīsh Chandra Ghoṣh, the great actor-dramatist of Bengal and a staunch devotee of the Master, had an experience beating all such records. When he had the first occasion of looking at her at Jayrāmbāṭī in 1891, he was dumbfounded to observe in her face the resemblance of a goddess who had visited him in a dream about thirty years back in his early youth, and had cured him of a fell disease. This reminds one of how an American mother was astonished at the first sight of Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's photograph, as it recalled a vision of 'the same face' in her early youth, when the Master had been alive. However, it struck Girīsh Bābu at the moment that the Holy Mother's supreme goodwill had been at the back of his blessed contact with the Master, and that it had practically been steering his life all through, against storms and whirlpools, towards the haven of everlasting peace and blessedness.

SWEETNESS INCARNATE

It holds one spell-bound to contemplate how a religious teacher with so much command over the spiritual growth of the pupils could be so simple and unassuming as the Holy Mother. Wrapped in utter humility, she would never claim any credit for anything. The divine grace descending upon any of those she blessed would invariably be ascribed by her to the Master as the source, just as the latter in his lifetime would refer such a phenomenon to his Divine Mother, Kālī. As a matter of fact, she effaced her personality altogether and saw nothing but Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa within and about her. The Master, realized by her as the latest Incarnation of God on earth, was her Lord, to whose service she had dedicated herself. She would feel the Master's divine presence in the portrait that she worshipped every day. She would actually see him partake of the food offered by her in the course of her worship. And it was a fact that in case he refused to take any such offering, she would go without food on that occasion. Really, her communion with the Master was an easy and natural occurrence in her everyday life!

It was not for such a soul to find fault with people. She had the rare habit of overlooking their drawbacks. Nor could she domineer over others. As a matter of fact, she could scarcely say nay to anybody. Averse to showing off her wisdom, she could not flatly contradict even any one holding an evidently wrong opinion. In such cases, she would usually suggest the right alternative in the form of a humble query, and thus gently lead the erring person to the correct view-point. Obviously, her procedure resembled the reputed method of Socrates.

Cast in the mould of absolute egolessness like Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa, she stood out in unique splendour as an endearing mother, enfolding all who came to her with her boundless affection.

Her keen solicitude even for the physical well-being of her children cannot be adequately described. She would personally see that the inmates of her house got their meals at the right hour, since she could not stand the sight of anybody in the grip of hunger. This was why she took care to finish her daily worship in good time, so that meals might be served to the household at the proper hour.

Yet special considerations would sometimes make her indifferent to the convenience of the inmates. Once there came a poor party in shabby dress, begging their passage all the way from a long distance, to meet her. Encouraged by some happy dreams, they reached her Calcutta house, and one of them remained closeted with her speaking out his mind. And this kept her engaged beyond her usual time of offering food to the deity. Naturally, as the lunch was being delayed, the inmates got annoyed at the indiscreet behaviour of the stranger. One of them, a young monastic disciple, said to him bluntly, "If you have any more to say, you should better come downstairs and talk to the senior monks." But the Holy Mother, moved by extreme sympathy for the sincere aspirant coming from a remote place in spite of pecuniary handicap, simply brushed aside the temporary inconvenience of the whole house and said firmly, "It does not matter if it grows late. I must hear what they have to say."

Thus, though she was so much concerned for her children, her affection was not reserved for any particular group. Broad as the sky and deep as the ocean, her heart was open to all. Not a shade of distinction could be noticed in her motherly dealings with persons who happened to come near her. Once a Muslim labourer, Amzad by name, engaged during the construction of her house at Jayrāmbāṭī, was fed by her on the veranda. Finding that her niece Nalinī, blinded by the prejudice of untouchability, could not serve food to him with due regard, the Holy Mother volunteered to do it, and she went so far as to clean the place after the meal was over. Shocked by this unexpected infringement of social practice, Nalinī blurted out, "Well, auntie, you have become an outcast." The Holy Mother silenced her by an astounding reply, "Why? Amzad is as much my child as Sharat (Swāmī Sāradānanda)." What a sweeping statement! For, while the latter was a worthy monastic disciple of the Master, a liberated soul and her own devoted attendant, the former was only a poor specimen of humanity given to occasional banditry. Equality in her eyes of these two persons occupying opposite points of the spiritual compass shows unmistakably the superhuman stand from which she took her readings. Nothing less than all-encompassing divine love may be imagined to be the source of such sameness of vision!

And this was, perhaps, the reason why she could be a model of endurance. She would calmly meet even the insensate demands of sentimental devotees on her indulgence. Someone took it into his head that he would worship the Holy Mother according to a ritualistic course, as one does an image. As this votary came in, the Holy Mother wrapped herself with a sheet and sat on the bedstead with her feet resting on the floor. The gentleman started his contemplated observance. After finishing the preliminaries and offering flowers at her feet, he solemnly set purifying himself through a fairly long interlude of breathing exercise as enjoined by the code of rituals. The Holy Mother waited patiently like a statue, allowing the devotee to satisfy himself, until Golāp Mā came and reprimanded him, saying, "Do you think that you are before a wooden image, which you are to vitalize by your breathing feats and all that? Have you no sense? Don't you see that Mother is pinned to an uncomfortable position by your zeal for ritualistic worship?" On another occasion, a quixotic devotee, in saluting her, hurt her big toe acutely by striking his forehead against it. When asked by somebody present there to explain his wild conduct, he replied with perfect nonchalance that the pain had been inflicted deliberately, so that the Holy Mother might remember him whenever she recalled that incident.

The sweetest phase of her dealings with disciples consisted in the way she would entertain them. With absolutely disinterested and impartial care for all, she would make every one of them feel her benign motherly touch. She would not let visitors go away without taking from her some sweets or fruits; and anybody coming at hours fixed for dinner or supper would have to take a share of the food prepared for the inmates. This was her usual practice in her

Calcutta residence, where Golāp Mā, who served as the housekeeper, would at times feel embarrassed by such unexpected guests being sent by the Holy Mother for their meals.

Yet, in Calcutta, her motherly instinct had to be subdued to some extent by many retarding factors of city life. It was in her country home at Jayrāmbāṭī that she could express herself without any let or hindrance. There she would not allow any one who happened to meet her to depart before spending at least two or three days. Sometimes she would press them for a longer stay. Knowing well the hardships one had to undergo for reaching that out-of-the-way village, she would often say sympathetically, "It is easy to visit Gayā or Banāras, but not this place."

And how she would receive them and look after their comforts! She would not feel it beneath her dignity to fan a devotee arriving there after a long walk, nor even to pour water on his feet to remove the dust or mud of the road. No amount of protest from the devotee would be of any avail. For she would invariably silence such objections with the soothing words, "After all, what have I done for you? Am I not your mother? Is it not the privilege of a mother to serve her child in every way—even to clean its dirt with her own hand?" Indeed, so long as her health permitted, nothing pleased her so much as to serve her disciples in every possible way. She loved to cook for them, feed them and even clean their leavings. She would be found sometimes in the early morning to go to the neighbouring houses to procure some milk needed for a devotee's diet or cup of tea. In case any of the devotees fell ill, she would anxiously sit by the sick-bed and try by all means for the recovery of the patient.

She would strive her utmost to provide her children with the best food available in the place that would suit the requirements of different individuals. Once it so happened that a lay disciple of the Master thought that the Holy Mother was partial to Swāmī Sāradānanda, whom she used to entertain with certain delicacies which had never been offered to him. Somehow she read the mind of the devotee and served on the same night identical meals to him and Swāmī Sāradānanda. But next morning, the gentleman, suffering from severe indigestion, came to realize the fact that the Holy Mother, instead of being partial to anybody, would prepare food for every person according to his need and habit, as far as it was possible within the limits of her rural household.

However, the Holy Mother would regret that nothing could be had from the local market for preparing dainty dishes for her children. That was why she was so keen about laying for them any delicacy sent to her by Swāmī Sāradānanda from Calcutta. She would send sweets and fruits received in this way first to the village deities and then to neighbours and relatives, and preserve the rest for entertaining her disciples, keeping scarcely anything for herself. She would be found also to preserve carefully for days together pastries prepared by her on any special occasion, so that the visiting devotees might relish them.

Like a true Indian mother, she would not take her meals before her children were fed. She would gladly wait even till late afternoon if any of them returned from some business to take his midday meal at that late hour. One winter day, one of her young monastic disciples, ignorant of her habit, kept her waiting in this way till late in the afternoon. And as she was not keeping well at that time, the young man, taken aback by her fast up to that hour in spite of her bad health, pleaded that she ought to have taken her meals at the usual time. But immediately he came to realize the incomparable affection of the Holy Mother from her balmy reply: "You have not taken your meals; so how could I?" Even one's earthly mother can hardly be expected to ignore her health to such a degree, though her love for the child is proverbially the highest in the world. Indeed, worldly love from any source, tainted with some amount of self-interest, would pale before the splendour of the absolutely selfless love of the Holy Mother!

The tenderest feelings of her heart would, however, be vividly exhibited when any of her children would take leave of her. The parting scene, charged invariably with pathos, would bring out in relief her motherly heart. With her eyes moistened with tears, she would reluctantly permit her disciples to bid good-bye to her. She would then accompany them up to some distance on the way, and wait there lovingly gazing at the receding figures till they passed out of sight. Indeed, it was against the tremendous attraction of her love that her parting children would have to drag themselves out of her view. Though the devotees would thus go away with heavy hearts they would carry the sweetest memory of the overwhelming love and solicitude of the Holy Mother.

Indeed, a person who had the good fortune of tasting her motherly love at Jayrāmbāṭī, could store up a priceless asset for his lifelong spiritual journey. Some of her disciples, it is worth recording, saw in her the physical likeness of their own mothers, whom they had lost in early life. As authentic facts of subjective vision, these cannot be ignored, though physical science at the present moment may not be in a position to explain them. It may be out of our depth to trace, with our sense-bound intellect, the causal link of such phenomena, but certainly we have no right to challenge the veracity of these well-observed facts. Whatever may have been the cause, these supernatural experiences point unmistakably to the halo of universal motherhood round the Holy Mother.

However, whether in the city or in the country-side, the Holy Mother's transparent sincerity, humility and openness of mind, and, above all, her overflowing affection, would reveal her to every one as the very incarnation of sweetness.

MEETING OF THE POLES

This exquisite sweetness embodied in the Holy Mother was wonderfully matched by her dignified bearing as well as her sagacious dealing with people and their affairs. The 'stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind,' her quick penetrating insight into the core of any problem placed before her and her extraordinary power of passing 'large and generous judgement' on matters, however new or complex, all these were no less impressive than her motherly tenderness. On the top of everything, her mastery of spiritual knowledge expressed through her priceless teachings in the simple *patois* of a village woman showed her supreme wisdom blended harmoniously with her self-effacing humility.

Though naturally very mild and compassionate, the Holy Mother would never be swayed by washy sentiments. There was no namby-pamby stuff in her mental constitution. Soft like a petal as she was, she could rise to any situation and become hard as a rock, if that was necessary. Simply a strange composure on her part would be so telling as to quell the wild behaviour of any perverse person about her.

At least for once she assumed a terrifying pose, diametrically opposed to her usual suavity. One day, a lay disciple of the Master, Harīsh, who was then a victim of insanity, chased the Holy Mother in her country-house at Kāmārpukur. Dismayed at first, she went round and round the granary in a corner of the house in order to avoid the mad man's pursuit. She did it for seven times; then suddenly something within her flared up, and at once she faced the lunatic, held him on the ground with her knee on his chest and went on slapping him on the cheeks till he began to gasp.

One wonders how terror and crystallized sweetness could thus go together! Really, our intellect fails to have a synthetic view of these opposites, just as it cannot comprehend Prakṛiti (Nature) combining the conflicting powers of creation and destruction. It was only open to the sages, endowed with intuitive vision, to have an inkling of the imperious majesty of the Being residing within the modest frame of the tenderest mother.

The meek and reverent attitude of the towering disciples of the Master towards the Holy Mother affords a clue to the right perspective born of intuition. Swāmī Vivekānanda, on his first return from the West in 1897, was going to pay his respects to the Holy Mother, who was then in Calcutta. On his way he felt so nervous to approach her that he repeatedly swallowed the holy water of the Ganges for washing off any possible impurity that might have touched his immaculate heart in the course of his stay in foreign lands! Mention may also be made of the fact that it was possible for the great Swāmī to launch his apostolic mission in the West only after getting himself armed with the Holy Mother's benediction. Another equally great soul, Swāmī Brahmānanda, was observed to tremble with awe while going to salute her, and after a few minutes' stay in her presence he would visibly perspire. This shows how his emotions would be worked up before her, as they would when he stood before the deity in any temple. Swāmī Premānanda, who was the embodiment of purity, behaved like a little child before the Holy Mother. Swāmī Yogānanda gave himself up for pleasing her by his unremitting service. After his death the Mother used to say, "No one loved me like Yogen. If any one gave him half a rupee, he would put it aside, saying, 'Mother may need it during a pilgrimage.'" The devotion of Swāmī Sāradānanda towards her knew no bounds; he would spare no pains to keep her free from all worries. That was why the Holy Mother said, "I shall have no difficulty so long as Sharat (Swāmī Sāradānanda) is there. Next to him I find none who can shoulder my burden." In this Swāmī's eyes, the sanctity of the Holy Mother made everything connected with her sacred. She herself observed that not only her relatives but even an animal belonging to Jayrāmbāṭī would be regarded by him with reverence! Instances may be multiplied to show how Swāmī Rāmakṛishṇānanda, Swāmī Adbhutānanda, Swāmī Shivānanda, in fact, all the monastic disciples of the Master, as also a number of eminent lay disciples, would look upon the Holy Mother as Divinity in flesh and blood.

Accepting from these spiritual giants such respectful homage, the Holy Mother, without losing for a moment her usual poise, remained as ever the humblest devotee of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa. Though she had no attachment to the world, she would busy herself in household chores like any domestic of a rural home. Even in her later days she would be found to sweep floors, clean dishes, dress vegetables, cook food, serve meals, and even to husk paddy. Indeed, no work was too low for her. And she used to do all these without any ado, apparently prompted by a spontaneous urge from within. Thus her dispassionate mind, pitched far above the world would appear to be engrossed in handling, with great care and skill, paltry things on earth. An impeccable model of karma-yoga, the Holy Mother's life went to demonstrate a perfect synthesis of attachment and detachment.

Though a wife, she was really a nun with the purest heart fixed for ever on God. Without actually being a mother, she was in every sense the loving mother of hundreds of children. Though her God-centred mind was always aloof from the world, she appeared to be an ideal householder to all intents and purposes.

This wonderful synthesis of contradictory elements in her life presents, undoubtedly, a unique manifestation of perfection on the human plane. The contradictory elements embraced each other so naturally that one set of these seemed to hide the opposite set. And that became really confounding to ordinary people, nay, sometimes even to high-souled devotees. Earth-bound persons, for instance, would see nothing in her except a busy housewife attached to mundane things just like any other village woman. Her concern for her brothers' family, particularly for some of its members, would at times look like earthly attachment even to the eyes of sincere spiritual aspirants.

Almost up to the eve of her passing away, she would look after the well-being of that household. She had four brothers, namely, Prasanna Kumār, Kālī Kumār, Varadā Prasād and Abhay Charaṇ. Being the eldest child, she helped her mother in bringing up these boys. Even when they grew up, got married and had children, they would count upon her affectionate care. As a matter of fact, after her mother's death in 1906, the Holy Mother virtually became the head of the family and behaved scrupulously like that.

Her brothers, except the youngest one, were of a different type. They were ordinary village folk tied to worldly interests, and often quarrelling with each other for trivial things. As a perfect contrast to the Holy Mother, they hardly rose to manhood. Unable to earn enough for their wives and children, they vied with each other in winning the favour of their illustrious sister and grabbing from her whatever they could. Rivalry and jealousy made it impossible for them to keep up their joint family. Counselled by the Holy Mother, Swāmī Sāradānanda went to Jayrāmbāṭī, partitioned their ancestral property to the satisfaction of all concerned and divided the family into its component units. Though after the partition the brothers might look after their own interests, they could not give up their habit of competing with each other for gaining some material aid from the Holy Mother. And they scarcely knew how they worried their kind-hearted sister by such conduct.

While at Jayrāmbāṭī, she would take part in their household duties. So long as her aged mother was alive and her brothers' wives were young, she would gladly relieve them all, as far as practicable, by carrying on the day-to-day work in addition to looking after the latter's children. As a matter of fact, Nalinī and Māku, Prasanna Kumār's eldest daughters by his first wife, were, after they had lost their mother, brought up by the Holy Mother as her own daughters. Even after they had been married and had children of their own, for various reasons they could hardly part company with their affectionate aunt. Kālī Kumār's son Bhūdev also would be found at times in her company along with some devotees and relatives.

Two more relatives sticking to the Holy Mother to the last require special mention. Of all the brothers the youngest, Abhay Charaṇ, was her favourite. He was a promising youth qualifying for the medical profession. But his career was cut short as he died in 1899, leaving a young wife who was then in the family way. On his death-bed he requested his generous sister to look after her and the child she was expecting. The Holy Mother readily agreed and, consequently, took charge of the young widow, Surabālā.

In this way, a stage was set for the play of the most puzzling role of her life. Shortly, Surabālā went off her head and in February, 1900, gave birth to a daughter, whom it was not possible for her to nurse. Naturally, the Holy Mother, according to her promise to her dying brother, had to step in and bring up the girl, as if she was her own child. The girl came to be named Rādhārānī, familiarly known as Rādhu or Rādhī, and she became fondly attached to the Holy Mother as her own mother. The latter also seemed to look upon the girl as the dearest object on earth. Even devotees would be astonished to observe how she was obsessed by thoughts of the girl's well-being.

Of course, saner minds with more penetrating vision, like Swāmī Brahmānanda, Swāmī Sāradānanda and their comrades, were convinced that this inordinate affection for Rādhu worked like a drag to continue the Holy Mother's life on earth ; for otherwise, they felt, it would not have been possible for her high-soaring, desireless mind to remain confined for long within the mortal body.

And this belief of theirs tallied perfectly with the Holy Mother's mystic foreknowledge obtained through a vision long before Rādhārānī was born. She disclosed this before some devotees with the following words: "How the Master has entangled me through Rādhu! . . . After the passing away of the Master I did not relish anything in life. I became utterly indifferent to the world and kept on praying, 'What shall I achieve by remaining in this world?' At that time I saw a girl, ten or twelve years old, dressed in a red cloth walking in front of me. The Master pointed her out to me and said, 'Cling to her as a support. Many children (disciples) will come to you.' The next moment he disappeared. I did not see the girl any more. Later on, I was seated in this very place. At that time Rādhu's mother was stark mad. She was dragging some rags pressed under her arm, Rādhu was crawling behind her weeping. Seeing this, I felt a peculiar sensation in my heart. I said to myself, 'Well, if I do not look after this child, who else will take care of her? She has no father, and her mother is that insane woman.' No sooner had I taken the child in my arms than I saw the Master and heard him say, 'This is that girl. Cling to her as your support. She is Yogamāyā (the Power that creates illusions).' "

This gives one a clue to grasping how under a spell of Yogamāyā, the Holy Mother even outbid earthly mothers by her passionate attachment to her virtually adopted child. Upon this girl, as the dearest object in the world, her pure and concentrated mind appeared to be riveted. Without Rādhu by her side she could hardly relish food or have refreshing sleep. And for the sake of this girl she had to bear patiently for nearly twenty years her outrageous conduct as well as that of her insane mother. By this alone the Holy Mother has left an unassailable record of endurance.

How she was tortured by Surabālā's sacrilegious behaviour! Spurred by wild fancy, the mad widow's tongue would occasionally run riot. To her morbid imagination the Holy Mother's affectionate care-taking of the child appeared to be nothing but witchcraft for weaning her from her mother's hold. She could not stand the sight of Rādhu clinging to the Mother as her pet. That was why she would often recklessly burst into reviling her even before devotees and strangers. Sometimes, seeing that her daughter was being treated with drugs, obviously for curing her of some ailments, Surabālā's sick brain would jump to the conclusion that the Holy Mother was attempting to kill her, and instantly she would fly into a rage. The Holy Mother, true to her promise to her dear departed brother, would calmly put up with all these frenzied acts of her abnormal sister-in-law, without reacting by a single harsh word. Referring to Surabālā's unbearable frantic outbursts of temper, she would simply regret, saying, "Perhaps I worshipped Shiva with Bilwa leaves having thorns. Therefore I have got this thorn in life."

Rādhu, the Holy Mother's favourite, was no less a trouble than Surabālā. She, too, began to display marked strains of craziness through her deportment. With a feeble mind in a feeble body, Rādhu was a sentimental noodle stuck in childish ways even when she became an adult. She fondly clung to the Holy Mother even after her marriage. Right from her girlhood, perversity seemed to be the core of her being. In return for the Holy Mother's constant affection, she had nothing sweet to offer. An indulged child that she was, with a conceited and petulant mind, she would go into tantrums at the slightest imaginary cause of irritation. She would then start hurling abuses and curses on the Holy Mother, with whom she would never hesitate to take unpardonable liberties. Her mental make-up was past correction or improvement in spite of the Holy Mother's hearty affection and benign contact. Rather, her mischievous pranks seemed to increase with age.

Towards the end of the Holy Mother's life, when she was ailing from repeated attacks of malaria, Rādhu gave birth to a male child in May, 1919, in the Jagadambā Āshrama at Koālpārā, where she had been brought by the former and kept under vigilant care owing to the fear of an impending break-down in her health. Even after six months of the baby's birth, she seemed to be too weak to stand up. Moreover, by then she had become an addict to opium, which she had begun to take, probably, as a quack remedy for some of her physical troubles. One day, for her daily dose of opium, she came crawling towards the Holy Mother, who was then dressing vegetables. In her anxiety to help Rādhu to give up this bad habit, she said rather sharply, "Rādhī, you have had enough of this. Why don't you stand up? It is impossible for me to take care of you any longer. ... Can you tell me how I can possibly meet all your expenses?" This was enough for Rādhu, who hurt the Holy Mother on the back by a violent throw of a brinjal picked up from the vegetable basket. A swelling appeared on the spot immediately; though bending her back in pain, the Holy Mother yet did an astounding thing. Instead of reproaching Rādhu for her wild conduct, she looked piteously at the Master's portrait and said with folded hands, "Lord, please forgive her misdemeanour, for she is senseless." Then putting on Rādhu's head the dust of her own feet by way of a blessing, she gave her a piece of her mind in the following incisive words: "Rādhī, the Master did not even once utter a word of remonstrance towards this body, and you afflict it so much. How can you understand where my place is? You think nothing of me because I live with you all." The Holy Mother's prompt forgiveness followed by these words brought the poor girl to her senses for the time being, and she broke into tears.

Thus, during the last twenty years of her life the Holy Mother bore complacently the burden laid on her shoulders by her deceased brother. Yet this was the peak period of her spiritual ministry. One knows how her mind would rise to celestial heights while engaged in worship or in initiating disciples; one knows, moreover, how matchless love would be showered by her on each and every one of her children, as also on the poor, the destitute and the penitent. Now let any one imagine how such a mind could at the same time be almost doting on Rādhu. Does it not look like a literal spanning of heaven and earth? Does such a meeting of the poles come within the range of human comprehension? Really, the mysterious play of her mind may only be equated with the inscrutable ways of Divinity!

It is easy to see that her excessive preoccupation with her brothers' family was a mask put on for keeping off worldly people, who would go away, finding nothing attractive or extraordinary in her. For instance, when she lamented over the death of Māku's precocious little son in April, 1919, such people would find nothing more than the wailing of an ordinary bereaved woman. Yet those devotees who were with her witnessed how her mind, which appeared to be tossed for days together owing to the bereavement, would become absolutely unruffled as soon as she entered the shrine for the daily worship.

Indeed, the conflicting phases of her mind would sometimes confound her close associates. Even Yogīn Mā, a high-souled devotee of the Master and an almost constant companion of the Holy Mother, was once caught in the trap. Under a spell of doubt, she began to think within herself, "The Master was a paragon of renunciation, but we see the Holy Mother behaving like a perfectly worldly person. Day and night she is restless about her brothers, nephews and nieces. I don't understand it." Assailed by such doubt, Yogīn Mā, while meditating on the bank of the Ganges, shortly had a vision that completely cleared the mist on her mind: The Master appeared before her and pointed out to her something floating on the river. Turning her eyes towards it, she noticed that a fresh-born baby enmeshed in the placenta was being carried away by the current. Then she heard the Master saying, "Can anything ever make the Ganges impure? Can anything defile its waters? Regard her (the Holy Mother), too, in the same way. Never have any doubt about her. Know that she and this (referring to himself) are identical."

Through this supernormal experience, a true perspective of the Holy Mother flashed on Yogīn Mā's pure mind. And this was verified by the former's radical change of bearing during her last days, when all of a sudden she quietly let go her hold on her earthly support. That she was far above infatuation for any worldly object became perfectly clear to all who had the chance of observing her during her final illness.

QUITTING THE STAGE

Some time in 1918, the Holy Mother came to be in the thick of her engrossment with Rādhu. By the end of January of the following year she left Calcutta with a slip of a girl subject to various ailments who was expecting a baby, and sought the homely surroundings of the Jagadambā Āshrama at Koālpārā. There she stayed for nearly six months and applied herself to piloting Rādhu through the ordeal of child-birth and afterwards to nursing the frail young mother as also her baby. Towards the last part of July, the Holy Mother shifted with her charges to Jayrāmbāṭī, where she intended to wait till they picked up enough strength for being conveyed to Calcutta.

The strain proved too much for her health to bear. During the period she had several attacks of malaria. And then on her birthday anniversary, the 19th of December, she was laid up with a virulent type of tropical fever, Kālā-āzār, as it came to be diagnosed later on. Local treatment having failed to cure her, she was brought over to Calcutta on the 27th February, 1920. Extremely weak, reduced almost to skin and bone, the Holy Mother was placed under reputed physicians of the city. But in spite of their earnest care and valued medical help, her health went on declining every day.

As a matter of fact, she was on her death-bed. Yet motherly tenderness did not leave her for a moment. Resigning herself entirely to the will of the Lord, she seemed to ignore her own physical condition, though her eager concern for others would be evident from her kind inquiries about their health and well-being. Even the visiting doctors would be impressed by her affectionate touch, since she would not let them leave the place before being entertained with some food. Then her solicitude for the spiritual growth of her children would be evinced when, lying prostrate on the bed in that precarious state of health, she would, at the cost of her much-needed sleep, regularly spend late hours at night in meditation and prayer for their welfare.

The only striking change, however, was a swing of her mind away from Rādhu, whom she had been hugging for twenty years. Rādhu with her baby as well as her mother Surabālā had come to Calcutta from Jayrāmbāṭī in the Holy Mother's train. However, when the Mother said one day that she had no longer anything to do with Rādhu, that she had withdrawn her mind from them all, her devoted attendant Swāmī Sāradānanda took it as an ominous signal. The Swāmī tried seriously, through the attending women devotees, to turn the course of her affection again towards the girl. But that was not to be. To all their earnest appeals in that behalf her emphatic and consistent reply was, "The mind that has been withdrawn will no more settle there. Remember this." This switching off, once for all, of her absorbing thoughts from Rādhu came like a bolt from the blue and terribly shocked all concerned, subjecting them to a distressing premonition that the hour was about to be struck for the close of the divine drama. All of them felt that, breaking through the spell of Yogamāyā, the Holy Mother was getting ready for quitting the stage of temporal life.

Five days before the crisis, the Holy Mother made a significant utterance while consoling a visiting lady devotee who had sobbed out, "Mother, what will happen to us hereafter?" In a very low voice, promptly came the reassuring words, "Why do you fear? You have seen the Master." Then, after a pause, she solemnly added, "But I tell you one thing—if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this entire world is your own!"

This pithy advice may appear like a truism or like an impracticable, idealistic talk. But when one takes into account the fact that it was based on her own empiric knowledge of the beneficent effect of a lifelong rigorous practice of the ideal, one is bound to feel the strength of her rock-ribbed faith embodied in these words. Though addressed to an individual, they conveyed her last message to the human race at a crucial moment of its history. These living, God-inspired words point out the much needed path of peace to the benighted peoples hopelessly seized at the present moment by a mutual distrust and animosity.

On the eve of her departure, however, getting Swāmī Sāradānanda by her side, she said, "Sharat, I am going. Yogen, Golāp and the rest are here. You look after them." On the 20th July, 1920, at 1-30 a.m. the Holy Mother left the physical world through a final ecstasy and stepped on to the Life Eternal.

EPILOGUE

Thus, by the beginning of the twenties of this century, the curtain was rung down on a beatific life-drama enacted on earth. Indeed, Romain Rolland's estimate of Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa, 'the Messiah of Bengal,' applies with no less emphasis to the Holy Mother. Her inner life also may be said to have 'embraced the whole multiplicity of men and gods,' and 'was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti.' It is remarkable that the roles played by this supernormal couple seem to have been cast after a set pattern of traditional Hindu faith.

From the non-dual view-point of the Hindu scriptures, Brahman, the Absolute Reality, appears through Its *maya* (Cosmic Power of creating illusions) as Īshwara (Personal God) characterized by two complementary aspects, namely, *parā-* and *aparā-prakṛiti*. Through the former, God appears as the eternal witness, the subject in all creatures, and through the latter, He appears as the eternally dynamic principle composing the physical and mental contents of the objective world and bringing about incessant changes in them.

This apparent dichotomy of Īshwara into two primal cosmic entities has been beautifully symbolized in Hindu mythology by the twin complementary divine personalities of Shiva and Shakti. Shiva stands for the witnessing and Shakti for the active principle of Nature. While the former lies stock-still, absorbed in meditation, the latter goes on with her non-stop, soul-stirring acts of creation, preservation and dissolution all over the cosmos. Both of them being appearances of the Unmanifested One, Shiva is the highest embodiment of Reality, while Shakti, as the prime mover of the panorama of Nature, mainly personifies *maya,* the Cosmic Power of illusion. These two again, viewed from another angle, reflect the Bliss aspect of Brahman by posing as the eternally attractive Nārāyaṇa and the eternally devoted Lakṣhmī. It is held by millions of Hindus that Rāma and Sītā as also Kṛiṣhṇa and Rādha are Incarnations on earth of this heavenly pair.

Observed in this light, Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa and Sāradā Devī appear to many as the latest manifestations of Divinity in flesh and blood with the complementary stamps on their respective personalities, corroborating the age-old Hindu belief in the epochal advent of such divine Incarnations.

Those, however, who are not used to the creedal view-point of the Hindus, as also those who cannot for some other reason believe in the descent of Divinity on the human plane, need not strain their credulity. They may, however, see how through the extraordinary life of the Holy Mother was written in letters of unalloyed gold 'Shrī Rāmakṛiṣhṇa's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood.'

This ideal, based on the wisdom of the seers and sages, has been the sheet-anchor of Indian civilization through the storm and stress of scores of centuries. Over and over again, it has been burnt deep in the national mind by the blazing lives of exemplary women, so that the cultural march of this country might not miss the paramount objective of the spiritual evolution of the human race. This ideal, based on spotless purity and self-immolating, universal love, has been revitalized in all its glory at a critical moment of human history by the matchless life of the Holy Mother.

Human society all over the earth appears, in our era, to be at the cross roads. The siren-call of pelf and power in the political, economic and social arenas, the crop of ever-new gadgets of sense-enjoyment turned out by advancing scientific acumen and, above all, the ominous fanfare of materialism throughout the world, are luring people's minds away from the rigid and narrow path of the spirit to the easier, broader and more fascinating one of the flesh. They are being led by a chaotic confusion of ideals to put a premium on self-indulgence, banning self-control as a meaningless fad of the old order. Perhaps, humanity, oblivious of its position as the vanguard in the momentous march of evolution, is about to turn back.

But a permanent lease of the brute-plane by mankind forebodes endless fights on behalf of sordid self-interests between individuals and classes, and this may eventually lead to the extinction of this advanced wing of evolution. Instead of wallowing in the mire of sense-pleasures, mankind, for its very existence, has to rise above the level of the sub-human order. The step forward in its eventful march should be towards evolving a more edified mind. It has to go ahead through gradual accretion of spiritual strength by manifesting the Divine within every man and woman. Nothing less than that will be able to steer human civilization towards the coveted goal of world peace. So long as it clings stubbornly to the sense-bound intellect and does not make for the kingdom of heaven within each individual, the 'One World' will remain an empty dream.

Though the modern world has been stirred up for securing liberty and equality on all fronts, the third grand objective, namely, fraternity will continue to be a far cry until man grasps the import of 'unity in diversity' as the basic constitution of Nature, both physical and mental. Without such an insight, even the struggles for liberty and equality may be vitiated by getting confined within the narrow limits of group interests and thus dividing mankind into various hostile camps. Indeed, a wrong reading of the fundamental make-up of Nature may lead people astray even while they are piously engaged in the pursuit of such commendable objectives. If, for instance, in the name of equality they rush against well-marked diversities having significant functional utility in the scheme of Nature, all their sincere and assiduous efforts may lead them nowhere, except to chaos and frustration.

One may take up a concrete case. There is at present a righteous urge almost everywhere for establishing the equality of women with men. Surely there should not be any domination of one sex over another. Nor should one of them be treated as merely a perpetual toy for gratifying the lower cravings of the other. Both the sexes, having the same immaculate Self at the core, possess infinite potentialities. Each has the innate power of going forward, physically, intellectually and spiritually. Neither of them should, therefore, be shackled in any way and barred from its natural all-round growth.

Yet one should pause to reflect if the structural and temperamental diversities stamped on them may be ignored with impunity by any one interested in the well-being of the entire human society.

Surely the target of women's achievement is equality and not uniformity with men. For if, in open defiance of Nature, the latter is sought, may not all the earnest efforts of women end in an appalling aberration spelling a disastrous loss of social balance? One is horrified to notice how their movement is tending recklessly towards such a staggering culmination. Women appear to be rushing to demonstrate their equality with men by behaving like the latter and competing with them in every field of social activity. Perhaps, released from their ancient bondage and seized by an incipient rage for equality, they are flinging to the winds the essential need of preserving social harmony, and moving heedlessly towards uniformity. More than half a century ago, Swāmī Vivekānanda remarked, "In the West the women did not very often seem to be women at all, they appeared to be the replicas of men." But this state of things is no longer limited to the Western countries only. Though the great Swāmī said, "In India alone the sight of feminine modesty and reserve soothes the eye," yet one shudders to find that this country also faces at present the danger of being caught in the current set going in the West towards the close of the last century.

Indeed, India is about to be cut loose from her ancient moorings on the spiritual rock of self-abnegation. The glamour of the present-day race for glory, privilege, power and prosperity seems to be too much for her to resist. Though Swāmī Vivekānanda said, "still on this sacred soil of India, this land of Sītā and Sāvitrī, among women may be found such character, such spirit of service, such affection, such compassion, contentment and reverence, as I could not find anywhere else in the world," yet it is apprehended that such a lovely condition may go with the wind, as the giddy steps of a section of educated Indian women ominously presage. In this wing already a discordant note appears to have been struck, and domestic bliss tends to become rapidly a thing of the past. Organized efforts are being made by this section to spread this new cult of equality, imported from foreign lands, among the masses of Indian women, so that all of them may be sucked in the maelstrom of confused ideals. What a gloomy prospect for this country that has been the blessed custodian of a precious cultural heritage meant for the edification of the entire human race!

Perhaps, it was to avert such a catastrophe that at this psychological moment the glorious ideal of Indian womanhood blazed up in the hallowed life of the Holy Mother. Those who are earnest to realize this ideal for the best interest of mankind, will find in this life a splendid exemplar of perfection, of all that may go to elevate women to their dignified position in society, namely, spotless purity, humility, absolutely selfless motherly tenderness, service, forbearance and compassion, and above all, one-pointed devotion to God as the fountain-head of all other virtues.

No barrier of caste, creed or colour could stand before the unimpeded flow of her limitless love. In her extreme solicitude for universal well-being she soared far above hide-bound social usage. While demonstrating by her life the worth of valuable assets handed down from the hoary past, she had the strength of rejecting all that appeared to be narrow and superstitious in the social customs of the day. Hence the veil over the face of such an enlightened soul, instead of being looked upon as a mere relic of the old order, may be taken to serve as a much needed counterpoise to the suicidal craze in certain quarters for doing away with all vestiges of femininity. However, freed entirely from the shackles of society and standing on the peak of spiritual enlightenment, the Holy Mother had liberty, equality and fraternity as the very breath of her life. Thus she stood like a perfect model, bringing over to this age whatever was salutary and congenial in ancient Indian culture, while fulfilling the noblest aspirations of modern women all over the earth.

Even when she was alive, it was given to Swāmī Vivekānanda, the eminent apostle who broadcasted Shrī Rāmakṛishṇa's message of the harmony of faiths and federation of mankind, to read the bearing of the Holy Mother's life on the womanhood of the world. In 1894, the Swāmī wrote from America to one of his brother-monks, "You have not understood the wonderful significance of the Mother's (Sāradā Devī's) life. But gradually you will know. Without Shakti (Power manifested through women) there is no regeneration for the world. . . . Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gārgīs and Maitreyīs be born into the world." This soul-stirring prophecy of the Swāmī unrolls a brilliant future of humanity through a timely revival of the age-old spiritual ideals among Indian women, as has been symbolized by Sāradā Devī's life.

In the searchlight of Swāmī Vivekānanda's prophetic vision one is thrilled to see how a glorious era of real advancement of human civilization has been heralded by the advent of the Holy Mother. People about to be lost in the wilderness of atavistic ideas are going surely to find their way out. After a depressing phase of decadence, they will step forward on the correct path of manifesting a little more of the Divine within them. The complementary natural types represented by the sexes, standing on a footing of sound equality, will be harnessed with congenial social duties in keeping with their structural and temperamental constitutions, and through their co-ordinated activities will ensure an enrapturing harmony. Such a harmony, the very basis of peace, will reign, in this era, not only in the domestic sphere but also in all communal, racial and international relations.

The ball has been set rolling. None need despair at the sight of the shaky and hazardous movement of the world at the present moment. One may very well take it that the harrowing scenes of mutual discord and conflict are surely going to be replaced by the coveted ones of concord and amity, so that the heirs of Immortal Bliss may come to their own. Let one and all from every corner of the earth brace themselves up for ushering in such a glorious epoch. May they all be roused by listening reverently to the life-giving words of Swāmī Vivekānanda's dynamic gospel of hope and faith: "Once more the doors have opened. Enter ye all into the realms of Light."

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THIS VOLUME deals with the ideals of Indian womanhood, its position in Indian life and society through the ages, as well as the biographical sketches and contributions of great Indian women who made their marks in different spheres of activities and different periods of Indian history.

It is divided into two main sections. The first gives a general survey of the ideals and position of Indian womanhood in different spheres of life, both in the past and in the present, together with a chapter on the evolution of Mother worship in India. This is intended to emphasize not only the highest conception of woman as mother, but also her potentialities as an instrument for realizing the Divine—the highest honour and reverence that a community can offer to its womanhood. This section mainly seeks to review in a general way what Indian woman was in the past and what she is at present, pointing to the obvious conclusion—what she may be in the future.

The same object is sought to be achieved in the second section by a study of the lives of great women in India—not only those who actually lived and died, but also many others who are known only from literary sources such as the Epics, Purāṇas, and classical Sanskrit literature.

WRAPPER AND INSIDE PICTURES ENGRAVED
AND PRINTED BY BENGAL AUTOTYPE CO., CAL.